



The Representation of Violence and Injustice in *Saw (2004)* Movie: A Forensic Linguistics Perspective

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2026 - 03- 18 Revised: 2026 03-30 Accepted: 2026 06-01	<i>Following Stuart Hall's theory of representation, this research uses forensic linguistics to examine how violence and injustice are represented in the Saw (2004) movie. The research aims to uncover how language is used to construct ideological meanings surrounding violence and injustice in the film. Using a qualitative descriptive method and content analysis, the research focuses on the dialogues, monologues, and narrative elements in Saw (2004) that reflect acts of physical and verbal violence, discrimination, and violations of human rights. The findings reveal that language is employed not merely to drive the plot, but to shape psychological manipulation, moral dilemmas, and systems of control. Jigsaw's use of commands, threats, and rhetorical devices portrays violence as moral retribution, while injustice is masked through coercive choices and oppressive structures. Forensic linguistic markers such as modality, imperative forms, metaphor, and evaluative language play a central role in constructing these representations. This research contributes to forensic linguistics and English education by demonstrating how language in popular media can encode power relations and ideological messages, highlighting the need for critical media literacy in academic settings.</i>
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1. Introduction

Language forms the way we see and experience something by turning it into meaning. Therefore, discourse or language use becomes important to understand ideology (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013). The relationship between language and

crime has opened new paths in forensic linguistic research, especially in media studies. This research studies how the *Saw (2004)* movie describes violence and injustice through language and storyline from a forensic linguistics perspective. This research is based on the view that language is a social practice that not only reflects reality, but also forms reality itself. In other words, language is not only a tool for communicating, but also a way to take social actions (Salkie, 2011).

The theory of representation of (Hall et al., 2013) is the basis of this research. He explained that the meaning did not appear naturally, but was formed through social agreements that were built through language and culture. That is, representation connects meaning and language with culture. A crucial step in the process of generating and communicating meaning is representation (Hall et al., 2013). The way we store, organize, and analyze information about the outside world is referred to as representation in the human mind. When we picture a tree, for instance, we not only visualize its form but also relate it to what we already know about trees (Goldstein, 2019). In learning and memory, representation is also crucial. Our ability to recall and utilize information stored in long-term memory is aided by mental representation (Eysenck & Keane, 2015). Even if we have never had firsthand experience, we may still comprehend and consider a lot of things through a representation (Smith & Kosslyn, 2009).

Forensic linguistics teaches language to uncover psychological manipulation, coercion, and concealed power (Salkie, 2011). A subfield of applied linguistics called forensic linguistics examines linguistic data to clarify unclear aspects of the legal system, such as criminal investigations and other legal matters (Ramezani et al., 2016). Using a forensic linguistics perspective, this research examines how the language in the *Saw (2004)* movie serves as a means of pointing out, defending, or denouncing violence and injustice in addition to telling stories. Forensic linguistics includes various types of texts or things related to language. A text is included in forensic linguistics research if it is related to criminal activity (Olsson, 2008). This research's data approach is interpretative, which means that the meaning is deduced by examining the surrounding circumstances or context.

Movie, as a form of mass media, serves both aesthetic and ideological functions. It is a part of culture that conveys values, worldviews, and critiques of society (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008). Movie acts as a medium for delivering social and moral messages to its audience. Its audiovisual nature creates an immersive experience that enables viewers to engage emotionally and intellectually with the depicted narrative. This engagement often leads to a sense of identification with characters or situations in the movie, making the experience feel accurate and relevant (Natalie & Haryono, 2024). Furthermore, movie can influence how people understand and evaluate social issues by framing them in specific ways. For example, many movies portray themes of violence and injustice—powerful social issues that can impact our daily lives. Thriller movies, such as *Saw (2004)*, often serve as a medium to explore these themes, which in turn can reinforce or challenge

viewers' perceptions of violence, morality, and social justice.

Violence is an act involving the use of force, either physical or psychological, to harm or intimidate another person. In both real life and media, violence can take many forms, each with its impacts and consequences. Violent behavior is a symptom of mental disorders that can trigger physical harm to the patient and others, accompanied by uncontrolled emotional outbursts (Siregar et al., 2020). There are two sorts of violence, nonverbal and verbal. Nonverbal violence comprises acts like harassment or other forms of intimidation that do not entail the use of words, whereas verbal violence involves the use of words to cause harm. Given that they can have distinct impacts on people and society as a whole, both forms of violence must be taken for consideration when examining how violence is portrayed in movies.

In social and cultural discourse, injustice is the term used to describe how people or groups are treated unfairly in society. This can manifest in a variety of forms, such as economic disparity, discrimination, oppression, and restricted access to basic resources like healthcare, education, and the judicial system (Triantonio, 2023). Social, political, and cultural systems that favor some groups over others on the basis of characteristics like sexual orientation, gender, race, or social class are frequently the source of injustice. Unfair legal systems or discriminatory employment practices that disadvantage particular people or communities are perhaps the most obvious examples of injustice.

Despite the fact that they are frequently linked, violence and injustice must be differentiated. Direct acts that inflict harm or pain, whether verbal or physical, are referred to as violence (Siregar et al., 2020). An imbalance in a social system or structure, on the other hand, is known as injustice. Examples of this include discrimination, unfair treatment, and denial of access to resources and rights (Triantonio, 2023). Based on these definitions, this research employs two main indicators: (1) the representation of violence and (2) the representation of injustice, each with specific sub-indicators. For violence: (a) nonverbal violence and (b) verbal violence. For injustice: (a) discrimination and (b) violation of human rights. These indicators are analyzed through language, specifically lexical choices and the structure of dialogues within the movie.

The *Saw (2004)* movie portrays violence as a form of "moral test" devised by its character, Jigsaw, who forces victims to choose between life and death through extreme suffering. In this context, violence functions as a means of "atonement," reflecting a societal tendency to justify acts of torture for ethical purposes (Walliss & Aston, 2012). Although Jigsaw's victims are technically given a choice, it occurs within a context of brutal torture, rendering their freedom essentially false. This mirrors the reality in some social systems where individuals appear to be free but are actually trapped within unjust rules (Aston & Walliss, 2013). *Saw (2004)*, directed by James Wan, differs from typical horror movies that rely solely on gore; it embeds its narrative with questions about justice, morality, and the human

condition. Its antagonist, the Jigsaw Killer, does not merely kill but he constructs elaborate "games" that force victims to confront their own ethical failures. Jigsaw's actions are manifested through intricate traps that offer victims a chance of escape, but at a tremendous cost, often requiring the sacrifice of limbs or other body parts (Wehde & Downey, 2024). These games are communicated through speech, writing, and recordings—making language a central tool for creating and legitimizing violence.

This research is relevant to the English education study program because it shows how linguistics can be used to analyze text or dialogue in a movie. By learning language in movie through a forensic linguistics approach, students and academics can deepen their understanding of discourse analysis, multimodal literacy, and ethical impacts of the use of language in the media. In addition, this research encourages future teacher candidates to develop critical media literacy skills in class so that students can understand and question ideological messages that exist in today's culture (Wulan et al., 2023).

The novelty of this research lies in its approach that combines the research of horror movies with forensic linguistics analysis—a joint that is still rarely found in previous studies. This research uses the theory of representation of the Stuart Hall to analyze how violence and injustice are formed through language in movies, especially through the dialogue used. In addition, this research discusses violence and injustice, two themes that often appear in horror movies but are rarely analyzed systematically from the perspective of language. This research also contributes to the field of English education because it provides real material and in accordance with the times, which can be used to practice critical thinking skills and text analysis.

Representation of violence and injustice in movie has been discussed in several previous studies. Prayogo et al., 2018 examines the representation of violence in the *The Secret Life of Pets* movie, while Hermayanthi, 2020 analyzes violence against children in the *Miss Baek* movie. Another research by Saskhia & Suranto, 2021 discussed gender injustice in the *Moxie* movie with a semiotic approach, and Ananda & Wibowo, 2022 investigated injustice against hazing victims in the *Penyalin Cahaya* movie through semiotic analysis. The results of these studies show that movies are often used as a medium to display violence and injustice in various social contexts, such as injustice against children, women, and other vulnerable groups.

Although various studies have explored the representation of violence and injustice in movies, none have specifically examined how these elements are employed to generate psychological tension and provoke moral dilemmas from a forensic linguistics perspective. This research seeks to uncover the strategies used in dialogue, narrative, and other linguistic elements within *Saw (2004)* movie to represent acts of violence and injustice, as well as to understand how these meanings are constructed and interpreted by the audience. Guided by Stuart Hall's

theory of representation, the research focuses on two central questions: how violence and injustice are represented in *Saw (2004)* movie through a forensic linguistics perspective, and how the movie communicates ideological messages about violence and injustice.

2. Method

In this research, the researcher uses a qualitative descriptive method, where qualitative descriptive study is a research method that describes and portrays the research object based on facts that seem to use qualitative data, then elaborates on it descriptively (Anantatur & Asfar, 2021). Qualitative descriptive studies aim to remain close to the data and offer a direct description of the phenomenon, making it the preferred method when detailed factual summaries are needed (Sandelowski, 2000). This approach is chosen because it allows the researcher to explore the meanings constructed in the movie's text and the ideological impact it has on the audience. In this context, forensic linguistics is viewed not only as a tool for criminal analysis but also as a theoretical framework that reveals how language is used to justify or challenge actions involving violence and injustice.

Thus, the data source for this research is the *Saw (2004)* movie, released on October 29, 2004. The movie has a duration of 1 hour and 42 minutes. The main data in this research consists of dialogues, monologues, writings, and recordings in *Saw (2004)* that contain elements of violence and injustice. Data is collected by reading and noting several key points related to the research (Nurgiyantoro, 2018). Therefore, this research uses a content analysis method aimed at identifying, categorizing, and analyzing the representation of violence and injustice in the movie based on the language and discourse that appear. The researcher will focus on movie dialogues to obtain data relevant to the problems studied.

Data is collected through a process of watching and transcribing, which involves repeatedly watching the movie and noting relevant language segments, including forms of threats, commands, and narratives that carry ideological or moral content. Afterward, the researcher analyzes the content and categorizes it according to the research framework. Then, the researcher performs interpretation and links it to theory. Once the meanings are obtained, data analysis is conducted, culminating in a conclusion regarding how violence and injustice are represented in *Saw (2004)* through a forensic linguistics perspective.

3. Result

The results of this research reveal several significant patterns in the representation of violence and injustice in the *Saw (2004)* movie, particularly through the dialogue and linguistic constructions used by the antagonist Jigsaw. The data shows that:

Table 1. Violence and Injustice in *Saw (2004)* movie

Scene / Quote	Type of Violence / Injustice	Representation (Hall's Theory)	Forensic Linguistic Markers
"Rise and shine, Adam... You might be in the room that you die in."	Verbal Violence	Dominant representation of power: the threat of death is delivered manipulatively, framing suffering as "play"	Modal verbs ('might'), indirect threat, second-person pronoun
"Live or die. Make your choice."	Verbal Violence	The ideological construction that suffering is the result of individual decisions. In fact, there is no true freedom	Imperative + binary options, high-modality language, strategic ambiguity
"Your family is in a safe place... unless you do exactly as you're told."	Verbal Violence, Violation of Human Rights	Reproduces dominant control through a victim-agent; negotiated representation of power	Conditional threat ('unless'), pseudo-reassurance, impersonation of authority
"The device... will permanently rip your mouth open... The key is in your cellmate."	Physical Violence	Encodes survival through violence; dominant reading: redemption through suffering	Technical language, high-modality verbs, graphic description, second-person address
"Congratulations. You are still alive. Most people are so ungrateful to be alive. But not you, right?"	Verbal Violence, Discrimination	Oppositional: criticizes ungratefulness; dominant: frames Jigsaw as moral reformer	Moral statement as justification, second-person attack ('you'), ironic congratulation
"He doesn't want us to cut through our chains. He wants us to cut through our feet."	Physical Violence, Violation of Human Rights	Represents violence as deliberate test; decoded as oppressive system	Inference from evidence, logical deduction, fatalistic tone
"Let the game begin."	Verbal Violence	Frames torture as entertainment/game; encoding through irony and metaphor	Metaphorical language, imperative disguised as neutral announcement

4. Discussion

Representation of Verbal Violence in Saw (2004) Movie

The *Saw (2004)* movie consistently present verbal violence that not only intimidates, but also constructs a reality of domination and fear through language. Phrases such as “Rise and shine, Adam... You might be in the room that you die in” are clear examples of how perpetrators of domination use manipulative sentences that seem neutral but contain the threat of death. In Stuart Hall’s theory of representation, this is a form of dominant representation, where language becomes an instrument that systematically strengthens the position of power. This sentence plays with uncertainty through the modal verb might, creating psychological pressure on the victim without directly stating the threat.

In addition, the iconic sentence “Live or die. Make your choice.” shows how Jigsaw wraps coercion in the illusion of freedom. The choice of life or death is actually not a form of true freedom because both remain within the framework of suffering. Linguistically, the use of imperative forms and binary oppositions (live/die) emphasize high modality and strategic ambiguity, namely deliberate ambiguity to manipulate the victim’s perception. In this case, language is no longer just a means of communication, but a means to control and disrupt moral logic.

Representation of Physical and Symbolic Violence

Physical violence in *Saw (2004)* movie is shown brutally, but is always associated with a moral message conveyed through linguistic devices. Sentences such as “The device... will permanently rip your mouth open... The key is in your cellmate.” not only describe the physical threat explicitly, but also frame violence as a means of “redemption” or moral awareness. From Hall’s representational perspective, this reflects a dominant reading that implies that suffering is a path to moral improvement or salvation.

Linguistically, the use of technical terms such as “permanently rip” or “the key is in your cellmate” shows rationalized cruelty. Technical descriptions with high modality make violence feel systematic and legitimate. From a forensic linguistic perspective, the sentence structure and word choice create a narrative that erases the victim’s emotions and replaces them with procedural logic. This strengthens the perpetrator’s position as an authority who is not only physically powerful, but also discursively.

Representation of Injustice and Human Rights Violations

The injustice in the movie is evident through the manipulation of basic human rights, especially in the relationship between threat and control. For example, the sentence “Your family is in a safe place... unless you do exactly as you’re told.” uses the linguistic strategy of a conditional threat. Although it begins with a sentence that seems reassuring and protective, the ending removes the sense of security. In

Hall's representation, this reflects negotiated representation, where the meaning of protection is compromised by the surrender of power to the perpetrator of domination.

Another quote, "He doesn't want us to cut through our chains. He wants us to cut through our feet," illustrates systemic injustice where victims are forced to choose painful actions to escape a restrictive system. This creates the image that freedom can only be achieved through extreme suffering. In the context of forensic linguistics, the use of inference and fatalistic tone shows how logic in discourse is used to convey that violence is the only way out—a message that illustrates an oppressive and unjust social system.

Language Strategies for Building Moral Ideology

One of the most powerful linguistic elements in the movie is how language is used to frame violence as a form of moral correction. In the quote "Congratulations. You are still alive. Most people are so ungrateful to be alive. But not you, right?", Jigsaw delivers congratulations in a sarcastic tone, combining praise with criticism. In the framework of representation, this creates a duality of meaning—between oppositional and dominant readings. Oppositionally, this sentence can be understood as a critique of human indifference, but dominantly it positions the perpetrator as a legitimate moral figure.

From a forensic linguistic perspective, this sentence contains evaluative language, namely language that contains moral judgment, while simultaneously carrying out psychological attacks with the use of second-person pronouns and ironic congratulation. This strategy functions as a justification for cruel actions, which are wrapped in the rhetoric of learning or enlightenment. Thus, language becomes a weapon to blur the line between moral lessons and cruelty.

Language Games: Torture as "Game"

The short but significant statement "Let the game begin" is symbolic of how Jigsaw disguises the act of torture as a game. Theoretically, this is a form of metaphorization of violence, which aims to lower the moral weight of the brutal act and frame it in the context of competition or entertainment. In Hall's analysis, this is a form of dominant representation that normalizes violence as something that can be consumed intellectually and emotionally.

From a forensic linguistic perspective, the phrase contains a hidden imperative and a game metaphor, which in a pragmatic context implies complete control over the victim. This kind of language manipulates the perception of reality: instead of calling the act torture, the perpetrator calls it a game, which seems to have legitimate rules and goals. This is a perfect example of how power works through language.

5. Conclusion

This research has explored the intricate ways in which violence and injustice are represented in *Saw (2004)* movie through forensic linguistics perspective and Stuart Hall's theory of representation. The findings indicate that the movie intentionally use language to create ideological implications rather than just using verbal and physical violence as narrative tools. The movie's dialogue, particularly that of Jigsaw, the antagonist, serves as a psychological manipulation tool by enclosing moral dilemmas and justifying acts of cruelty under the guise of justice and redemption. By doing this, the movie challenges viewers to evaluate the fuzziness of the lines separating control, morality, and punishment.

From a forensic linguistics perspective, the representation of violence in the movie is shown through the use of command phrases, parables, conditional threats, and strong language. These linguistic elements give the impression that victims have a choice, while in reality, they are forced to participate in moral "tests." This is consistent with findings that suggest that sentiment and semantic elements in the language of a movie script can be strong predictors of violent content (Martinez et al., 2019). Meanwhile, representation of injustice in the movie arises from systematic human rights violations within the storyline, highlighting how language is used to support oppressive systems—a pattern also observed in cases of gender-based violence where linguistic choices reinforce domination (Benedetti & Queralt, 2023).

In addition, this research shows that language can be a tool as well as justification for cruelty. For example, the phrase "Let the game begin" describes torture as a game or entertainment, so that the boundary between punishment and pleasure becomes blurred. This is a clear example of how the choice of words in the language conveys the ideological meaning that makes violence look like normal. By using a forensic linguistic approach, this research reveals how the evidence of language in the movie helps build an atmosphere of fear, control, and moral messages in the movie story.

In the end, this research emphasized the importance of cross-field analysis to understand media texts. This research contributes to the field of forensic linguistics by showing that language in popular culture —especially movies—can be analyzed systematically to reveal hidden power and ideology. This research is also useful in English education because it encourages the development of critical media literacy, namely the ability of students to analyze language in various forms of text, including images and sounds. The novelty of this research is due to its multiple focus, namely in violence and injustice, as well as the application of forensic linguistics in horror-thriller movies. This gives a new view of how language not only reflects, but also forms the social reality that we consume.

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