

Visualizing Discrimination in Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Werewolf Marginalization in Days of Hana

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the portrayal of social issues such as segregation and discrimination in the webtoon *Days of Hana* by Seokwoo, which presents a fictional narrative about humans and werewolves. Employing Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) within Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar framework, this research investigates how visual elements contribute to meaning-making. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the study analyzes how discrimination against werewolves is conveyed through facial expressions, perspective angles, and image composition. The findings demonstrate that *Days of Hana* effectively integrates various visual modes to depict social hierarchies and power dynamics, thereby enhancing the narrative's depth and fostering an emotional connection with readers. Ultimately, this study underscores the role of webtoons as accessible cultural media that communicate significant social messages.

Keywords: digital comics, discrimination, Multimodal Discourse Analysis

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji representasi isu sosial seperti segregasi dan diskriminasi dalam webtoon *Days of Hana* oleh Seokwoo, yang menyajikan narasi fiksi tentang manusia dan manusia serigala. Dengan menerapkan Analisis Wacana Multimodal (MDA) dalam kerangka Visual Grammar dari Kress dan van Leeuwen, penelitian ini meneliti bagaimana elemen visual berkontribusi dalam pembentukan makna. Menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif, studi ini menganalisis bagaimana diskriminasi terhadap manusia serigala direpresentasikan melalui ekspresi wajah, sudut pandang, dan komposisi gambar. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa *Days of Hana* secara efektif mengintegrasikan berbagai mode visual untuk menggambarkan hierarki sosial dan dinamika kekuasaan, sehingga memperdalam narasi dan memperkuat keterlibatan emosional pembaca. Pada akhirnya, penelitian ini menegaskan peran webtoon sebagai media budaya yang mudah diakses untuk menyampaikan pesan sosial yang bermakna.

Kata kunci: komik digital, diskriminasi, Analisis Wacana Multimodal

INTRODUCTION

In the digital era, the popularity of webtoons as a form of digital visual media continues to rise globally. This growing popularity not only establishes webtoons as a source of entertainment but also as an effective medium for addressing relevant social issues. Webtoons are digital comics specifically designed for mobile and online platforms, making them more accessible than traditional comics. Particularly in South Korea, platforms like LINE Webtoon allow artists to share their stories with global audiences (Yoon, 2024). As a technology-driven comic development company, LINE Webtoon enables creators to reach a vast readership (Fauziah & Nasrullah, 2023).

Regardless of genre, webtoon narratives often convey deeper messages beyond entertainment, embedding moral and social themes within their storytelling (Fathurohman et al., 2023). These themes commonly address social issues such as gender inequality, patriarchy, feminism, racism, and discrimination. Given their accessibility and wide reach, webtoons effectively utilize visual elements such as character expressions, settings, and overall image composition to reinforce narrative messages (Yuliaqanita et al., 2024). Studies on multimodal discourse in digital media (Steele, 2024; Bateman & Tseng, 2023; Okuley, 2023) further emphasize how digital storytelling constructs ideological narratives that influence public perception. The interaction between visual storytelling and social issues becomes particularly evident when analyzed using Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA), which examines how multimodal elements reflect and emphasize themes like segregation and discrimination.

Days of Hana by Seokwoo serves as a compelling example for an MDA-based analysis due to its strong thematic focus on

discrimination and social hierarchy. As one of the most widely read webtoons, it has accumulated over 100 million reads, with an average of 4,000 comments per episode on the LINE Webtoon English application. Additionally, with over 1 million subscribers and more than 7 million likes, *Days of Hana* has significantly influenced its audience. The webtoon presents a fictional world where humans and werewolves coexist, yet werewolves face systematic oppression. The story revolves around Hana, a human, and Haru, a werewolf, who struggle against societal prejudice, dehumanization, and exclusion. Although *Days of Hana* includes emotional relationships between characters, it also explores deeper issues related to segregation, discrimination, and social inequality. These themes reflect real-world dynamics and shape readers' perspectives on relevant social issues, reinforcing the role of webtoons as powerful cultural mediums for social commentary.

This research employs the Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) framework to examine how visual elements in *Days of Hana* contribute to meaning-making. Expanding on Halliday's (2014) concept of grammar as a resource for communication, MDA extends this framework to visual and multimodal texts. Specifically, this study utilizes Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Visual Grammar theory, which asserts that images have their own structured grammar similar to verbal language. According to this theory, images communicate meaning through three primary components: Representational, Interactive, and Compositional meanings.

1. **Representational Meaning** refers to how visual elements depict actions, objects, or relationships. It differentiates between narrative representation, where elements indicate movement and interaction, and conceptual representation, where elements denote identities, classifications, or

attributes. In narrative representation, participants can be categorized as actors (active agents) and goals (passive recipients of actions). Additionally, circumstances provide context within which the depicted events occur.

2. **Interactive Meaning** focuses on how visual elements establish relationships between the image and the audience. This includes elements such as contact (eye gaze between the image subject and viewer), social distance (close-up, medium, or long-shot perspectives), attitude (frontal or oblique angles), and modality (visual markers such as color saturation and brightness). Studies by Bateman & Wildfeuer (2014) and Sultan & AlKhafaji (2022) further explore how interactive elements in digital narratives shape audience engagement.
3. **Compositional Meaning** pertains to how visual elements are arranged to create meaning. It includes information value (the positioning of elements), salience (elements emphasized for reader attention), and framing (separation or connection between elements). Prior research (Chovanec, 2019; Wang & Catalano, 2022) highlights how composition in digital storytelling functions as an ideological tool in conveying social messages.

Several previous studies have employed MDA to analyze different objects and perspectives, though with varying focuses. For instance, Permata Yanda & Rhamadanti (2018) analyzed novel covers, while this study specifically examines webtoon content. Hidayat et al. (2018) focused on advertisements, which differ significantly from the multimodal nature of webtoons. Other studies, such as Suyudi (2015), analyzed conventional comics, whereas this study concentrates on digital comics. Moreover, while some studies incorporate translation studies alongside MDA, this

research focuses exclusively on MDA's multimodal aspects. Additional perspectives on multimodal literacy in digital media (Curwood & Gibbons, 2010; Moses & Reid, 2021) suggest that digital comics not only serve as entertainment but also play a role in literacy development and social critique. By addressing these gaps, this study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of how *Days of Hana* visually constructs themes of discrimination and power dynamics.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design to investigate the multimodal construction of discrimination in *Days of Hana*. Qualitative research enables a detailed exploration of how visual and linguistic elements work together to encode meaning within digital narratives (Tenny et al., 2017). Specifically, the research follows a multimodal approach, integrating semiotic and discourse analysis to examine textual and visual components. This methodological combination allows for an in-depth analysis of the representation of discrimination and power structures within the webtoon.

The dataset consists of *Days of Hana* by Seokwoo, which includes 113 episodes. Given the extensive nature of the content, purposive sampling (Fauzy, 2019) was applied to select five key episodes—12, 13, 47, 58, and 65—that prominently depict discrimination against werewolves. Each selected episode was analyzed at the scene level, focusing on instances of prejudice, social exclusion, and hierarchical power relations, expressed through both dialogue and imagery.

The data collection process follows a qualitative audiovisual analysis framework (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), emphasizing the interaction between textual and visual modes

in shaping meaning. The research procedures include:

1. Identifying key scenes that explicitly portray discrimination and bias.
2. Extracting relevant dialogues and corresponding visual elements.
3. Analyzing character expressions, spatial compositions, and background settings that reinforce social hierarchies.
4. Establishing coherence between visual and textual narratives to ensure a comprehensive multimodal interpretation.

For data analysis, this study adopts Miles et al. (2014)'s three-phase framework:

1. Data Reduction – Selecting and refining relevant textual and visual data while eliminating extraneous elements.
2. Data Display – Structuring findings into thematic categories that emphasize power relations, prejudice, and symbolic representations.
3. Conclusion Drawing and Verification – Synthesizing findings to determine how multimodal elements reinforce narratives of discrimination and their broader sociocultural implications.

Furthermore, the study integrates a critical discourse analysis perspective (Steele, 2024; Bateman & Tseng, 2023) to examine how ideological frameworks are embedded in digital comics. By combining MDA and critical discourse analysis, the research provides a comprehensive interpretation of *Days of Hana* as a multimodal text that challenges and reflects on social discrimination. This methodological approach ensures a nuanced understanding of how digital storytelling can influence and shape public perceptions of marginalized communities.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

This section analyzes how *Days of Hana* employs visual elements to portray critical societal issues, including power dynamics, prejudice, and stereotypes. The analysis first examines key case studies that highlight discriminatory practices within the webtoon, followed by a discussion of the theoretical framework based on Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Visual Grammar, complemented by insights from recent critical discourse and multimodal analysis studies (Nurfitriani, 2022; Raffone, 2022; Berger, 2024; Grooms, 2025; Steele, 2024; Bateman & Wildfeuer, 2014).

Case Analysis: Discrimination Depicted in Key Scenes

The following examples illustrate how visual elements in *Days of Hana* construct narratives of discrimination:

Datum 1: Physical Abuse and Dehumanization (Chapter 12)



Figure 1. Students electrocutting Choco with an electric collar

A werewolf character, Choco, is subjected to physical abuse by human students using an electric collar. The **narrative representation** in this scene highlights the power imbalance,

with the students positioned as active agents while Choco is rendered powerless. The framing isolates Choco, emphasizing his victimization, while the absence of direct gaze further reinforces his dehumanization. The visual depiction of pain, coupled with jagged speech bubbles, intensifies the audience’s emotional response. This aligns with Berger’s (2024) discussion on binary oppositions in social narratives, where marginalized groups are framed as passive subjects.

Datum 2: Verbal Discrimination and Social Exclusion (Chapter 13)



Figure 2. Students verbally attacking Choco

Verbal abuse directed at Choco portrays explicit discrimination, with students using derogatory language to assert dominance. The **interactive meaning** in this scene is reinforced by dismissive gestures and detachment, depicting werewolves as subservient figures. The verbal mode, paired with character expressions, strengthens the discriminatory discourse. The choice of an oblique angle in framing further emphasizes Choco’s alienation from the human characters. This is consistent with Raffone’s (2022) findings on social-semiotic hate speech, which demonstrates how

digital media narratives reinforce systemic bias.

Datum 3: Pursuit and Dehumanization (Chapter 47)

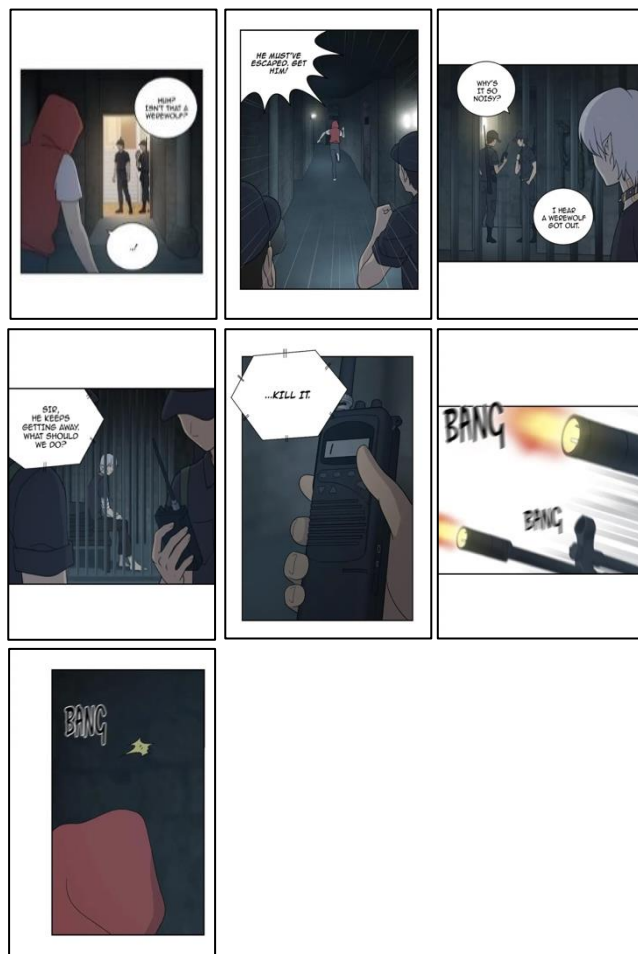


Figure 3. Haru being chased by armed guards

Haru, a werewolf, is pursued by security guards under orders to be executed. The **compositional meaning** in this scene is evident in the use of dark tones and heavy shadows, intensifying the fear and hostility surrounding werewolf characters. The positioning of guards in dominant stances reinforces the oppression, while the use of an oblique angle detaches the audience from Haru’s perspective, mirroring his isolation. The onomatopoeic text “BANG” in bold jagged letters emphasizes the severity of the threat. Grooms (2025) highlights similar racialized power structures in HBO’s *Vice Principals*, where dominant groups enforce systemic control through multimodal means.

Datum 4: Denial of Service and Systemic Discrimination (Chapter 58)



Figure 4. A shopkeeper refusing service to werewolves

Werewolves are refused service at a store, emphasizing systemic discrimination. The **salience** of the shopkeeper’s rigid stance and cold expression visually reinforces societal prejudice, while the framing of werewolves outside the store highlights their marginalized status. The dialogue’s short, clipped structure further accentuates the dismissive tone of the interaction. Steele (2024) discusses similar themes in media representations of gender-based violence, noting that exclusionary discourse often manifests through both verbal and visual modalities.

Datum 5: Physical Punishment and Subjugation (Chapter 65)



Figure 5. A werewolf being whipped by his owner

A werewolf is brutally whipped by his owner, highlighting physical subjugation. The **close-up shots** and intense red hues accentuate violence, evoking emotional distress in the audience. The fragmented composition of the scene reflects the fractured identity and suffering of werewolves, reinforcing their victimization within the narrative. Bateman and Wildfeuer (2014) argue that multimodal discourse in visual narratives often employs fragmentation to emphasize systemic oppression, a technique clearly utilized in this scene.

Theoretical Lens: Multimodal Discourse Analysis in *Days of Hana*

Following the case analysis, this section applies Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2006) Visual Grammar framework to further explain the role of multimodal elements in conveying discrimination.

Representational Meaning

Representational meaning in *Days of Hana* is realized through narrative and conceptual structures. The webtoon frequently employs narrative representation to depict actions and interactions between characters, reinforcing power imbalances. In the scenes analyzed, werewolves are often positioned as the passive “goal” in transactional action processes, emphasizing their victimization. This is in line with Nurfitriani’s (2022) analysis of gender discrimination discourse, where marginalized identities are positioned as passive subjects.

Interactive Meaning and Audience Engagement

Interactive meaning in *Days of Hana* is constructed through contact, social distance, and attitude. Eye contact is strategically avoided in many scenes, positioning werewolves as subjects to be observed rather than engaged with, thereby dehumanizing them. However, in moments of heightened emotional distress, direct gaze is used to establish a stronger connection with the audience, evoking sympathy. This approach mirrors Chovanec’s (2019) analysis of multimodal storytelling, which examines how image sequences manipulate viewer empathy and engagement.

Compositional Meaning and Symbolism

Compositional meaning is conveyed through information value, framing, and salience. Webtoon panels are arranged in a top-to-bottom format, mirroring the hierarchical power structures within the narrative. The top panels often establish ideological ideals or social norms, while the bottom panels reveal the harsh realities of discrimination. These structures align with Walsh’s (2009) study on multimodal redesign in digital texts, highlighting how spatial organization

influences meaning-making in visual narratives.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of *Days of Hana* through the lens of Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) reveals the intricate ways in which various multimodal mechanisms interact to construct and reinforce themes of discrimination and segregation. The integration of representational, interactive, and compositional elements within the visual narrative enhances the emotional engagement of readers, enabling them to empathize deeply with the characters' struggles. Furthermore, the strategic use of modality-based cues—such as dialogue, framing, and spatial composition—further underscores the power imbalances and systemic biases embedded within the storyline.

This study underscores the evolving role of webtoons beyond mere entertainment, positioning them as influential cultural artifacts that critically engage with pressing social issues. By leveraging multimodal storytelling, digital comics can challenge dominant narratives, provoke discourse, and foster civic awareness on issues such as marginalization, prejudice, and inequality. These findings align with broader discussions on multimodal discourse and digital storytelling (Nurfitriani, 2022; Berger, 2024; Grooms, 2025), reinforcing the argument that digital comics serve as a dynamic medium for social critique.

Future research could extend this analysis by incorporating additional digital storytelling elements, such as soundtracks, animations, or interactive features, to explore how these modes contribute to meaning-making in digital narratives. Additionally, investigating audience reception across diverse cultural contexts could provide deeper insight into how webtoon narratives shape societal perceptions of discrimination. Such studies would further enrich our understanding of multimodal

discourse in digital media, highlighting the transformative potential of visual storytelling in contemporary digital culture.

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