

## Interrogating the Miseducative and Regressive Discourse of Problem-Solving in “Miraculous Ladybug”: Towards a Critical TBLT and Media Literacy Approach for L2 Pedagogy

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Research Paper

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**Abstract:** This study employs a corpus assisted quantitative-qualitative CDA approach (Fairclough, 2003) of 1,308 utterances from *Miraculous Ladybug* in the processes of facing and solving a problem. Findings reveal a pervasive authoritarian discourse characterized by high-frequency imperatives (58.5%), certainty modals (24.5%), and absolutist language (42.5%), against a critical deficit in collaborative markers (<1% conditionals). While these repetitive structures align with input flooding (Ellis, 2015) for SLA, they simultaneously model a miseducative discourse and regressive pedagogy that promote instinct and magical solutionism over deliberation. This discourse naturalizes a deep hierarchical divide and trains L2 learners in the unquestioning acceptance of authority, thereby fostering an anti-deliberative, reductive, and uncritical mindset. To address this paradox, we propose a critical pedagogical framework that integrates Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and critical media literacy (Kellner & Share, 2019). This approach transforms the series' limitations into teachable moments, enabling educators to use its valuable comprehensible input while reducing its ideological load and developing learners' critical, collaborative problem-solving skills.

**Keywords:** Critical Discourse Analysis, Critical Media Literacy, Miseducative Discourse, Problem-Solving Discourse, Regressive Pedagogy

### Introduction

Animated media has become a significant source of incidental language input for young learners, with research demonstrating its capacity to shape linguistic and cognitive development (Lemish, 2015; Peters & Webb, 2018). *Miraculous Ladybug*, a globally popular children's and young adolescent series, exemplifies this phenomenon through its highly repetitive, action-driven discourse. However, while its linguistic patterns align with principles of second language acquisition (SLA) (Ellis, 2015), the show's authoritarian discursive framing raises critical concerns. Through an analysis of its linguistic patterns, informed by Fairclough's (2003) critical discourse analysis (CDA), this paper examines the tension between *Ladybug*'s potential as a pedagogical tool and its ideological limitations. Through an analysis of its linguistic patterns, informed by Fairclough's (2003) CDA, this paper examines the tension between *Miraculous Ladybug*'s potential as a pedagogical tool and its ideological limitations. Specifically, it argues that the show's discourse naturalizes a neoliberal approach to problem-solving, characterized by impulsive communication, the idealization of rapid individual action, and the marginalization of collective negotiation. This miseducative discourse model embodies what can be termed a regressive pedagogy (Block, 2018; Kellner & Share, 2019), one that prioritizes uncritical obedience and instinctual response over reflective collaboration and critical thought.

Drawing on John Dewey (1938), an experience is “miseducative” if it “has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience” (p. 25). The discourse in *Miraculous Ladybug* is miseducative because, while facilitative for mechanical language acquisition, it actively and deliberately represses higher-order metacognitive, cognitive, and pragmatic development in the viewer. This is particularly consequential as the cognitive and metacognitive systems of young viewers are actively developing during the very period they are most captivated by such animations; exposure to

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this discourse during a critical developmental span can therefore distort their foundational problem-solving skills and attitudes. For instance, the protagonist's repetitive, non-negotiable commands (e.g., "Cat Noir, now!") model communication as a one-way transmission of orders, thereby suppressing the development of skills in collaborative negotiation and reflective problem-solving. Simultaneously, the series exemplifies a regressive pedagogy (Freire, 1970), an approach that prioritizes the transmission of fixed solutions and unquestioning obedience to authority, thereby stifling inquiry and critical consciousness. This is routinely illustrated in narrative sequences where complex socio-emotional conflicts are resolved not through dialogue or critical thinking, but through magical intervention (e.g., "Lucky Charm!"), systematically distorting the concept of problem-solving by framing instant, top-down solutions as the only valid approach.

Thus, the core paradox investigated is dual: the series offers rich, comprehensible input ideal for SLA while simultaneously modeling a discursive framework that undermines the collaborative, critical, and agentive competencies that progressive language pedagogy seeks to develop. This analysis focuses specifically on the show's problem-solving discourse for two compelling reasons. First, problem-solving is a foundational competency for navigating real-life challenges and interactions. Second, within the series' narrative structure, the problem-solving sequence is the essential climax of every episode, making it the primary site where the show's model of authority and resolution is most prominently displayed and, consequently, where its pedagogical impact is likely most potent.

### Statement of the Problem

The widespread engagement with *Miraculous Ladybug* among young audiences in Iran—observed through its frequent broadcast on international channels, its availability via online streaming, and its prominent presence in children's merchandising—underscores its role as a dominant source of incidental English input. This local relevance, alongside its global distribution, frames a critical yet understudied tension for L2 pedagogy in the Iranian context. On one hand, the series offers a rich source of comprehensible input through its highly repetitive, formulaic language, aligning with established principles of input flooding and chunk-based learning. Its high-frequency imperatives (e.g., 39.0% direct commands) and modals of certainty and obligation (e.g., *will* at 24.5%, *must* at 16.1%) provide input consistent with Ellis's (2015) model of frequency-based acquisition. On the other hand, this linguistic efficiency comes with profound ideological consequences. The show's near-total absence of conditional structures (<1%), hedges, and collaborative discourse markers systematically suppresses metacognitive, cognitive and pragmatic development and nuanced deliberation, instead promoting a model of problem-solving reliant on magic, instinct and authoritarian directive.

This creates a critical pedagogical vacuum. While current SLA research effectively highlights the mechanical benefits of such input, it largely neglects how sustained exposure to this authoritarian discourse may risk fossilizing reductive communication patterns in learners. Simultaneously, the field of critical media literacy, while adept at deconstructing ideological baggage in children's media, offers few practical strategies for language educators seeking to repurpose such engaging yet problematic content. Consequently, a theoretical gap persists: critical discourse analyses of neoliberal tropes in children's media rarely engage with SLA's focus on input optimization, leaving educators without a framework to reconcile a show's linguistic utility with its ideological limitations.

Therefore, this study is driven by three central questions: what are the linguistic properties of the problem-solving discourse of *Ladybug*? What ideological philosophy underpins this discourse? And what can be done to nullify its potential adverse effects on SLA learners? This research directly addresses this gap by investigating how *Miraculous Ladybug* provides potent L2 input while simultaneously modeling a miseducative approach to problem-solving. Ultimately, it proposes a critical pedagogical framework that merges SLA and critical media perspectives to transform this paradox into a teachable moment. To address this paradox, the present study is guided by the following research questions:

**Research Question One:** What specific linguistic patterns characterize Ladybug's problem-solving discourse?

**Research Question Two:** 2-What ideological assumptions are implicitly conveyed through these linguistic choices?

**Research Question Three:** What are the potential implications and consequences of these patterns for SLA learners' pragmatic, communicative, metacognitive, and cognitive development?

**Research Question Four:** In what ways does this discursive model deviate from authentic, collaborative problem-solving and the core principles of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)?

**Research Question Five:** How can the principles of critical media literacy and TBLT be applied to mitigate the show's miseducative discourse and to promote, problem-solving skills in the L2 learning?

### Literature Review

Animated media has emerged as a significant and complex source of incidental language input for young learners. A growing body of research illuminates its dual potential: it is both a powerful pedagogical tool and a subtle vehicle for ideology. On one hand, the linguistic benefits are well-documented. Children's programming provides rich, multimodal input that can substantially enhance vocabulary acquisition. This efficacy is supported by Paivio's (1986) Dual Coding Theory, which maintains that the combination of visual and verbal stimuli creates stronger cognitive connections than single-mode input. Empirical evidence, such as the longitudinal study by Peters and Webb (2018) which demonstrated a 22% improvement in recall rates among young viewers, confirms its value for incidental vocabulary uptake and formulaic language retention. Furthermore, beyond discrete vocabulary, this medium can effectively model and shape higher-order cognitive and metacognitive skills, as viewers implicitly learn from the problem-solving processes and conflict-resolution strategies modeled by characters (Bandura, 1994; Nikolajeva, 2017).

However, this very capacity for modeling makes the nature of the discourse critically important. A closer examination reveals a concerning ideological dimension within this linguistic input. Internationally, comprehensive analyses, such as Nikolajeva's (2017) study of 100 animated episodes, have uncovered a systemic predominance of directive speech acts (averaging 48.2%) coupled with a notably limited use of hedging devices. This pattern suggests a media environment that predominantly privileges assertive, monologic communication over collaborative deliberation, normalizing a top-down approach to interaction.

Within the Iranian academic context, CDA has been productively employed to deconstruct similar ideological underpinnings in both internationally dubbed and locally produced animations. A prominent line of research has focused on gender representation. For instance, Aghagolzadeh and Tajabadi (2020), in their analysis of the Persian-dubbed *Cinderella*, demonstrated how specific linguistic choices systematically framed the protagonist as passive, emotional, and dependent on male rescue. Similarly, Khosravi and Aghagolzadeh (2017) conducted a critical multimodal discourse analysis of *Frozen*, revealing how its Persian dubbing reconstructed neoliberal femininity, thereby demonstrating the transnational flow and local adaptation of specific ideological constructs in children's media.

There is a crucial theoretical gap in understanding the full impact of animated media on learners: the specific mechanism through which linguistically rich but ideologically problematic input transitions from being merely neutral or entertaining to being actively counter-educational. To address this, our study introduces and applies John Dewey's (1938) concept of the miseducative experience. Dewey argued that not all experiences are inherently educative; an experience is miseducative if it "has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience" (p. 25). An animation, therefore, can be miseducative if its discourse, while teaching vocabulary, simultaneously hinders the development of more advanced capacities.

Simultaneously, there is a substantial body of Iranian research exploring Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), with empirical studies consistently affirming its effectiveness over traditional methods in enhancing learners' communicative competence and motivation (e.g., Ahmadian & Tavakoli, 2014; Zarei & Ahangari, 2016). TBLT is particularly relevant to the analysis of problem-solving discourse because it is founded on the principle that language is acquired through meaning-focused, goal-oriented tasks, often centered on solving authentic problems collaboratively. This pedagogical approach thus provides a natural theoretical and methodological lens for examining how problem-solving is linguistically modeled in media and for designing interventions that promote collaborative, deliberative communication in L2 learners.

However, a critical synthesis of these domains reveals a significant gap. The existing CDA work on cartoons in Iran has primarily focused on content-oriented ideologies (e.g., values, gender roles). It has not yet extensively addressed the underlying pedagogical models embedded in the discourse, specifically, the linguistic structure of how problems are solved, how authority is constructed. This represents a shift from analyzing what is being taught (values) to how a way of thinking and learning is being modeled (pedagogy). Furthermore, while TBLT is well-researched for language outcomes, it has not been mobilized as a pedagogical solution to counter the specific discursive problem-solving models identified by CDA.

This study addresses a new frontier by integrating these domains. It proposes a convergent pedagogical framework that first employs CDA to analyze the problem-solving discourse in popular media and then utilizes TBLT principles to design interventions. The goal is to simultaneously foster language acquisition and critical media literacy, empowering learners to deconstruct and resist anti-deliberative communicative models.

## Theoretical Framework

### Faircloughian Critical Discourse Analysis

This study employs Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which examines discourse as text, discursive practice, and sociocultural practice (Fairclough, 1995; 2001). This framework enables a systematic investigation of how power and ideology are enacted through language.

The analysis focuses on the textual dimension, operationalized through Fairclough's (2003) method for examining linguistically salient features. The coding scheme integrates:

- Transitivity (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014) to analyze agency and responsibility;
- Speech act theory (Searle, 1976) to classify illocutionary force;
- Modality (Palmer, 1990) to distinguish obligation and certainty;
- Absolute language and emotional lexicon to trace ideological framing and affective construction.

### Van Dijk's Ideological Square

The Faircloughian Critical Discourse Analysis approach is supplemented by van Dijk's (2008) concept of the ideological square. Van Dijk's model provides a framework for analyzing how ideologies of power, gender, and nationalism, among others, are reproduced and legitimized through discourse. The "square" consists of four fundamental discursive strategies:

1. Emphasize positive information about Us (Our group is brave, rational, moral).
2. Emphasize negative information about Them (Their group is aggressive, irrational, untrustworthy).
3. De-emphasize negative information about Us (Our mistakes are minor, justified, or accidental).

4. De-emphasize positive information about Them (Their successes are due to luck, dishonesty, or are insignificant).

In media analysis, this framework reveals how texts can systematically privilege certain values, identities, and actions (e.g., individualism, decisive leadership, a specific type of heroism) while simultaneously marginalizing or delegitimizing others (e.g., collectivism, cautious deliberation, alternative forms of problem-solving).

### **Task-Based Language Teaching**

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) is a pedagogical approach proposing that language acquisition is most effective when learners use language authentically to achieve non-linguistic outcomes, such as solving problems or completing collaborative tasks (Ellis, 2003; Long, 2015). In essence, these tasks are very often problem-solving activities, requiring learners to use language to collaboratively address a gap, resolve an issue, or reach a decision. Its theoretical foundation is an integration of cognitive and sociocultural perspectives. From a cognitive standpoint, it is informed by Schmidt's (1990) Noticing Hypothesis, which argues that learners must first consciously notice, or pay attention to, linguistic forms in the input for those forms to be acquired. TBLT creates conditions for this noticing by engaging learners in meaningful communication, where gaps between what they want to say and what they *can* say become apparent, encouraging them to attend to new or problematic language.

Simultaneously, TBLT is rooted in sociocultural approaches to mediated learning (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006), which view language development as a socially mediated process. In this view, higher-order cognitive processes, including language acquisition, are first constructed through collaborative interaction with others (e.g., peers, a teacher) before being internalized by the individual. TBLT's task cycle, with its phases of planning, execution, and reporting, is designed to scaffold this process, providing a structured context for learners to use language as a tool for thinking and problem-solving together.

By synthesizing these perspectives, TBLT emphasizes negotiation of meaning, metacognitive reflection, authentic language use, and collaborative problem-solving; positioning the learner not as a passive recipient of linguistic rules but as an active agent in a socially situated learning process. The framework is typically realized through a cyclical process involving three key phases:

1. Pre-task: The teacher introduces the topic and the task, which often frames a specific problem to be solved, helping learners activate relevant schemata and understand the goals.
2. Task Cycle:
  - Task: Learners perform the task in pairs or small groups. This is the core problem-solving phase, where they use their available language resources to negotiate meaning and achieve the outcome.
  - Planning: Learners prepare to report to the whole class how they solved the problem and what their outcome was.
  - Report: Selected groups present their solutions and the process they used to the class.
3. Language Focus:
  - Analysis: The teacher facilitates an examination of specific linguistic features that arose from the problem-solving endeavor or were necessary for its completion.
  - Practice: The teacher may conduct controlled practice activities based on the analyzed language features.

## Integrating CDA and TBLT: Addressing a Theoretical Gap

While research exists on animated media as L2 input, critical discourse in children's media, and TBLT methodology, few studies integrate these domains. This study bridges that gap by using Fairclough's CDA to analyze how *Miraculous Ladybug*'s linguistic architecture promotes anti-deliberative values, while simultaneously proposing a TBLT-informed pedagogical framework to foster critical language awareness and counter these regressive discourses.

### Methodology

#### Data Collection and Sampling

This study employs a corpus assisted quantitative-qualitative CDA approach. The primary corpus consists of spoken utterances from the character Ladybug (Marinette Dupain-Cheng) in the animated series *Miraculous: Tales of Ladybug & Cat Noir*. To ensure a representative sample, data was drawn from 50 episodes which were randomly selected across Seasons 1 through 5.

Every instance of dialogue from Ladybug was transcribed precisely. From this larger transcript, a focused corpus was constructed for analysis. The protagonist's highly formulaic and repetitive linguistic style facilitated a more straightforward and systematic categorization process. The inclusion criterion was strictly limited to utterances within problem-solving sequences. This was operationalized as dialogues that involved planning, executing, or reflecting upon conflict resolution against antagonists. Casual or off-topic remarks, such as "hello" and other greetings, as well as unrelated comments to the process of problem-solving were excluded. This process yielded a final analytical corpus of  $N = 1,308$  utterances.

#### Analytical Framework: Faircloughian Three-Dimensional CDA

This study is structured upon Norman Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which conceptualizes discourse as operating across interconnected levels of text, discursive practice, and sociocultural practice. The analysis is designed as a structured movement from the micro-linguistic to the macro-ideological. The rigorous examination of the textual dimension serves as the critical launching point, establishing the empirical foundation necessary to support claims at the higher levels of analysis.

In this framework, the quantification of specific linguistic features, such as patterns of modality (e.g., the use of must versus could), mood (e.g., the frequency of imperative structures), and transitivity (e.g., who is positioned as the actor in a clause), functions to construct the essential building blocks for critical interpretation.

#### Coding Procedures and Reliability Measures

##### Coding Scheme

In order to conduct the coding procedure, 1,308 utterances were coded by the primary researcher. To assess inter-coder reliability, a second professional linguist independently coded a randomly selected subset (10%) of these utterances based on the operational definitions below.

##### Voice

- Active: The subject performs the action (e.g., "*I will solve this.*").
- Passive: The subject is acted upon (e.g., "*It will be solved.*"). Includes agentless passives.

##### Mood

- Imperative: Utterances intended to command, instruct, or urge.

- *Direct Command*: "Cat Noir, now!"
- *Delegative*: "You take the left side."
- *Self-Directed*: "Think, Marinette, think!"

Modality: Modal verbs were coded for type and semantic function.

- Deontic: Expresses obligation, permission, or prohibition (e.g., "*We must win.*").
- Epistemic: Expresses certainty, probability, or possibility (e.g., "*This will work.*").

Tense-Aspect: The primary tense of the main verb was coded.

- Present: "I trust my luck."
- Future: "We will succeed."
- Past: "I knew it!"

Semantic Content

- Absolute Language: Includes universal quantifiers (e.g., *every, always, never*), binary oppositions (*good vs. evil*), and superlatives (e.g., *perfect, best*).
- Emotional Lexicon: Includes affective verbs (e.g., *feel, hope*), body metaphors (*trust your gut*), and exclamations (e.g., *Yes!*).

Pragmatic Function (Speech Acts): Coded based on Searle's (1976) taxonomy:

- Directives: Attempts to get the listener to do something (e.g., commands, requests).
- Assertives: Commit the speaker to the truth of a proposition (e.g., statements, claims).
- Expressives: Express the speaker's psychological state (e.g., thanks, apologies, joy, fear).
- Commissive: Commit the speaker to a future course of action (e.g., promises, pledges).

This synthesized approach, integrating key linguistic theories under Fairclough's (2003) guidance, allows for a rigorous textual analysis that serves as the foundation for critical interpretation.

### ***Reliability Assurance: Adjudication and AI-Assisted Verification***

To ensure a high degree of coding consistency and objectivity, a multi-stage verification process was implemented. The primary researcher first coded the entire corpus. Subsequently, a second trained linguist independently coded a random 10% subset (131 utterances). Inter-coder reliability was high ( $\kappa = 0.83$ ), and all discrepancies were discussed and resolved to refine the coding rules.

To further enhance objectivity and minimize potential confirmation bias in resolving challenging or ambiguous cases, an AI-assisted verification phase was incorporated as a supplementary analytical tool, not as a primary coder. The AI language model (DeepSeek-V3) was used to provide a consistent, rule-based perspective on specific, pre-identified ambiguous utterances. The AI consultation phase was as follows:

1. Prompt Structure: For each ambiguous case, the AI was provided with the exact operational definition from our coding manual (e.g., the definition of an "Expressive" speech act or "Absolute Language" highlighted within the whole Faircloughian CDA), followed by the isolated utterance in question. *Example Prompt: "Based on the following definition—'Expressive Speech Acts: Express the speaker's psychological state (e.g., thanks, apologies, joy, fear) in Faircloughian (2003) critical discourse analysis'—classify the utterance: 'Perfect!' Provide only the classification."*
2. AI Role and Weight: The AI's output was treated strictly as a neutral, rule-checking reference. Its classification did not automatically determine human judgment. The core function was to identify instances where the researchers' interpretation might have deviated from the strict operational definitions, prompting a re-examination. In cases of disagreement, researchers

engaged in a critical dialogue with the AI's output, sometimes challenging its classification. This recursive process ensured that the final decision resulted from a reflective adjudication between rule-based consistency and interpretive validity.

3. Final Adjudication: All final coding decisions were made by the human researchers through consensus. The AI's judgment was used to structure the deliberation, ensuring the discussion was based on the formal coding rules rather than unexamined subjective interpretation.

The use of AI in qualitative discourse analysis might present inherent limitations. Language models operate on statistical patterns and lack genuine understanding of sociocultural context or ideological nuance which is the central objective of CDA. Therefore, its utility was deliberately confined to the textual dimension of Fairclough's model (e.g., syntactic classification), where rule-based logic applies. It was not consulted for interpretations related to discursive practice or sociocultural practice. This restricted, transparent use of AI served as a verification mechanism for reliability at the micro-linguistic level, while preserving the indispensable role of critical human interpretation for the macro-ideological analysis. An example that illustrates both the nature of the coding challenges and the refinement process involved utterances such as the exclamation "Perfect!" Initial coding inconsistencies emerged regarding its classification, while one coder identified it primarily as a Speech Act (Expressive), another highlighted its multifaceted character as both an Emotional Lexicon (Exclamation) and an instance of Absolute Language (Superlative). The AI, when prompted with the respective definitions, could identify all three applicable codes. This output did not decide the case but formally confirmed that the coding framework required multi-dimensional analysis where applicable. It was established that a single utterance could simultaneously be analyzed across different linguistic levels: in this case, its pragmatic function (Expressive), its semantic content (Emotional Lexicon), and its discursive framing (Absolute Language). This clarification ensured that the coding captured the full ideological weight of such utterances, where emotional and absolutist language converge to intensify the speaker's expressive act.

### Data Normalization and Presentation

To facilitate interpretation and comparison across features of varying frequencies, raw counts were converted into normalized frequencies per 100 utterances. This allows for a clear representation of how often a given linguistic structure occurs within Ladybug's problem-solving discourse. All findings are presented in the following section as both raw counts and normalized frequencies.

## Results

This analysis strictly examines syntactic (passive/active voice & imperative mood), morphosyntactic (modality & tense-aspect), semantic (absolute language & emotional lexicon), and pragmatic (speech acts & negation patterns) structures in Ladybug's utterances, quantifying their frequency and distribution. Data is drawn from 50 episodes (Seasons 1–5), with frequencies normalized per 100 utterances. Quantitative analysis of Ladybug's problem-solving language with a focus on linguistic structures reveals the following findings:

### Syntactic Structures

**Table 1**

*Passive vs. Active Voice*

Structure	Example	Raw Count	Frequency (Per 100 Utterances)	95% CI
Passive Voice	"The solution will be shown to me."	112	8.6	(7.1%, 10.3%)

Active Voice	"I'll find the solution!"	1,196	91.4	(89.7%, 92.9%)
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**Table 2***Imperative Mood*

Type	Example	Raw Count	Frequency (Per 100 Utterances)	95% CI
Direct Command	"Fix it now!"	510	39.0	(36.3%, 41.8%)
Delegative	"Cat Noir, distract them!"	180	13.8	(11.9%, 15.9%)
Self-Directed	"Believe in yourself!"	75	5.7	(4.5%, 7.2%)

Quantitative analysis reveals Ladybug's overwhelming preference for active voice (91.4%; 95% CI (89.7%, 92.9%)) over passive constructions (8.6%; 95% CI (7.1%, 10.3%)), linguistically reinforcing her role as the primary agent in problem-solving. Passive constructions appear only in contexts of deferred agency (e.g., "It must be done"), while active voice dominates self-referential assertions (e.g., "I'll solve this"). More strikingly, imperative mood constitutes 58.5% of utterances (a sum of the direct, delegative, and self-directed sub-categories below), with direct commands (39.0%; 95% CI (36.3%, 41.8%)) being most frequent, followed by delegative directives (13.8%; 95% CI (11.9%, 15.9%)) and self-directed imperatives (5.7%; 95% CI (4.5%, 7.2%)).

**Morpho-Syntactic Features****Table 3***Modal Verb Usage*

Modal	Example	Raw Count	Frequency (Per 100 Utterances)	95% CI
Must	"We must win!"	211	16.1	(14.2%, 18.2%)
Will	"It will work!"	321	24.5	(22.2%, 26.9%)
Can't	"I can't fail!"	150	11.5	(9.8%, 13.4%)

**Table 4***Tense-Aspect Distribution*

Tense	Example	Raw Count	Frequency (Per 100 Utterances)	95% CI
Present	"I trust my instincts!"	889	68.0	(65.4%, 70.5%)
Future	"We'll save Paris!"	290	22.2	(20.0%, 24.5%)
Past	"The answer was inside me!"	128	9.8	(8.2%, 11.6%)

Ladybug's linguistic patterns demonstrate a marked preference for modal verbs (59.4% of utterances), with those expressing certainty (*will*, 24.5%; 95% CI (22.2%, 26.9%)) and obligation (*must*, 16.1%; 95% CI (14.2%, 18.2%)) being particularly prominent. These modal constructions combine with a strong present-tense orientation (68.0%; 95% CI (65.4%, 70.5%)) to create a discourse of immediate action and decisive authority. The temporal distribution shows limited future reference (22.2%; 95% CI (20.0%, 24.5%)), typically modalized) and minimal past reflection (9.8%; 95% CI (8.2%, 11.6%)), constructing a problem-solving approach that prioritizes present intervention over retrospective analysis or prospective planning.

## Semantic Structures

**Table 5**

*Absolute Language*

Category	Example	Raw Count	Frequency (Per 100 Utterances)	95% CI
Universal Quantifiers	"Always," "never," "every,"	340	26.0	(23.6%, 28.5%)
Binary Oppositions	"Right side vs. wrong side"	95	7.3	(5.9%, 8.9%)
Superlatives	"Perfect solution!"	120	9.2	(7.6%, 11.0%)

**Table 6**

*Emotional Lexicon*

Type	Example	Raw Count	Frequency (Per 100 Utterances)	95% CI
Body Metaphors	"Trust your gut!"	150	11.5	(9.8%, 13.4%)
Affective Verbs	"I feel it's right!"	210	16.1	(14.2%, 18.2%)
Exclamations	"YES! This is it!"	180	13.8	(11.9%, 15.9%)

Ladybug's linguistic patterns demonstrate a pronounced reliance on absolutist framing (42.5% of utterances) and emotional appeals (41.4%), constructing a problem-solving paradigm that privileges instinctive certainty over nuanced deliberation. The absolutist language manifests primarily through universal quantifiers ("*always*," "*never*", 26.0%; 95% CI (23.6%, 28.5%)), binary oppositions (7.3%; 95% CI (5.9%, 8.9%)), and superlatives (9.2%; 95% CI (7.6%, 11.0%)), while emotional language appears through body metaphors (11.5%; 95% CI (9.8%, 13.4%)), affective verbs (16.1%; 95% CI (14.2%, 18.2%)), and exclamations (13.8%; 95% CI (11.9%, 15.9%)). Notably, these features co-occur in 22% of cases, creating a mutually reinforcing rhetorical system where emotional conviction (affective appeals rather than logic) validates categorical assertions (absolute, black-and-white statements that leave no room for alternative perspectives).

## Pragmatic Structures

**Table 7**

*Speech Acts*

Type	Example	Raw Count	Frequency (Per 100 Utterances)	95% CI
Directives	"Do this now!"	690	52.7	(50.0%, 55.4%)
Assertives	"We will win."	420	32.1	(29.6%, 34.7%)
Expressives	"I'm so scared!"	150	11.5	(9.8%, 13.4%)
Commissives	"I promise to fix it!"	48	3.7	(2.7%, 4.9%)

Table 8

*Negation Patterns*

Type	Example	Raw Count	Frequency (Per 100 Utterances)	95% CI
Dismissive	"Don't overthink it!"	220	16.8	(14.8%, 19.0%)
Descriptive	"This isn't working."	95	7.3	(5.9%, 8.9%)

Ladybug's speech patterns reveal a remarkably consistent pragmatic framework dominated by action-oriented and certainty-driven communication. The analysis shows that 84.8% of her utterances function as either directives (52.7%; 95% CI (50.0%, 55.4%)) or assertives (32.1%; 95% CI (29.6%, 34.7%)), creating a communicative paradigm that prioritizes decisive action over collaborative deliberation. This overwhelming preference manifests most clearly in imperative directives ("Do this now!") and assertive declarations ("We will win"), which together form the backbone of her communicative style. The limited presence of other speech acts, notably expressives (11.5%; 95% CI (9.8%, 13.4%)) and commissives (3.7%; 95% CI (2.7%, 4.9%)), suggests a systematic narrowing of communicative possibilities within her discourse.

The negation patterns further reinforce this authoritative model, with dismissive negations ("Don't overthink it!") occurring twice as frequently as descriptive ones ("This isn't working"). At 16.8% occurrence rate (95% CI (14.8%, 19.0%)), these dismissive forms function as discursive tools to actively suppress alternative perspectives or approaches, while descriptive negations occur at 7.3% (95% CI (5.9%, 8.9%)). When combined with the high frequency of directives and assertives, these pragmatic features construct a communicative environment where hesitation is systematically discouraged and certainty is consistently rewarded. The emotional lexicon, appearing in 41.4% of utterances through body metaphors (11.5%; 95% CI (9.8%, 13.4%)), affective expressions (16.1%; 95% CI (14.2%, 18.2%)), and exclamations (13.8%; 95% CI (11.9%, 15.9%)), serves to intensify these speech acts, adding an instinctual and affective urgency rather than deliberative thinking to directives and emotional conviction to assertions.

### Discussion

The quantitative findings presented in Section 6 provide the empirical bedrock for a critical qualitative interpretation of the problem-solving discourse in *Miraculous Ladybug*. From a Faircloughian CDA perspective, these linguistic patterns are not merely stylistic choices; they are the very mechanism through which a regressive pedagogical ideology is naturalized, a process that operates by centralizing authority and masking the exercise of power (Fairclough, 2003). Here, *centralizing authority* refers to the discursive concentration of problem-solving agency and the right to define truth in a single, unquestionable figure (Ladybug), while masking the exercise of power denotes the linguistic erasure of alternative viewpoints and collaborative deliberation, framing the imposed solution not as a contestable choice but as a neutral, objective necessity. This ideology stands in fundamental contrast to the values of autonomy and critical thinking desired by human nature and promoted in some narratives. Katry, the protagonist of the children's animation *Katry, the Little Farmer*, offers a powerful counter-model: "You don't need fancy tools or magic to solve problems. Sometimes all you need is a little creativity and a lot of determination."

This attitude of self-reliance provides a crucial lens through which to analyze the miseducative discourse (Dewey, 1938) of *Miraculous Ladybug*, which, as the data shows, reinforces dependency, passivity, and authoritarianism over critical autonomy, collaboration and determination. This lens reveals that the linguistic patterns in *Miraculous Ladybug* form a coherent system that promotes certain values (e.g., authoritarianism, magic solutionism, a simplistic approach to complex problems) while marginalizing others. The emphasis on fostering critical autonomy over passive reception aligns with findings in the Iranian EFL context; for instance, Soodmand Afshar and Movassagh (2017) found that explicit instruction in critical thinking skills significantly enhanced the argumentative writing

performance of university students, underscoring the pedagogical value and viability of cultivating deliberative mindsets in learners.

The findings can be critically interpreted through van Dijk's (2008) concept of the ideological square, a framework which posits that ideologies are discursively managed by emphasizing positive properties of one's own group while de-emphasizing those of others, and by stressing the negative properties of outsiders while mitigating one's own.

### **The Linguistic Architecture of Authoritarian Solutionism**

The results paint a picture of a protagonist whose communication is overwhelmingly monologic and directive. The high frequency of imperatives (58.5% of utterances, with 39.0% being direct commands) and assertives (32.1%) creates a communicative paradigm where dialogue is replaced by declaration. This is not collaborative teamwork but a command-obey dynamic, linguistically reducing allies like Cat Noir to mere executors of Ladybug's will, as seen in delegative directives ("*Cat Noir, distract them!*"). This pattern treats teammates as instruments, casting subordinates in a passive role and naturalizing hierarchy by constructing unequal power relations where only the chosen leader holds the right to plan.

This authoritarian model is further reinforced by the morphosyntactic features. The dominance of modals of certainty ("*will*" at 24.5%) and modals of obligation ("*must*" at 16.1%) positions Ladybug as both the character with privileged access to truth ("*It will work!*") and the sole source of moral imperative and necessity ("*We must win!*"). This ratio of certainty to obligation (1.5:1) naturalizes her unquestioned authority, framing her commands not as debatable and subjective choices but as objective necessities. This removal of alternative viewpoints and framing authority as beyond question erases the possibility of negotiation, a finding that aligns with Nikolajeva's (2017) analysis of directive speech acts dominating children's media, thereby discouraging collaborative negotiated problem-solving and critical deliberative reasoning.

### **Modeling Dependency and Magical Solutionism**

The narrative frames Ladybug as a resourceful problem-solver, yet her linguistics reveal a profound passive dependency on external, magical systems. This is illustrated in a recurrent linguistic pattern: an initial marker of uncertainty ("*I don't know what to do...*") is immediately resolved not through cognitive effort or collaboration but by resorting to a magical tool ("*...I'll just throw my yo-yo and see what happens!*"). This pattern serves to naturalize reliance on magical authority rather than model a genuine metacognitive and cognitive struggle to solve problems. Consequently, success is portrayed not as a product of effort and self-determination (Dweck, 2006), but as an event determined by external forces like destiny or luck, a theme reinforced by expressions of unwavering faith in magical tools ("*It never lets me down!*"). This discourse actively discourages the development of intrinsic problem-solving skills, critical thinking, and perseverance, potentially fostering a habit of passivity in viewers who learn to wait for external solutions rather than cultivate initiative. The discourse actively discourages the development of intrinsic problem-solving skills, critical thinking, and perseverance, potentially fostering a habit of passivity in viewers who learn to wait for external solutions rather than promote initiative. Over time, the dissonance between this internalized model of miraculous, readily available resolutions and the complex, effortful nature of real-world problem-solving may create a psychological vulnerability. This vulnerability is grounded in established theories such as Social Cognitive Theory which posits that observed models significantly influence self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1994). When the dominant model is an infallible superhero whose success relies on magic and instinct—not effort, collaboration, or learned skill—viewers may develop unrealistic standards for their own problem-solving abilities and a reduced sense of personal agency.

Furthermore, research on fantasy-reality distinctions indicates that while children can differentiate the two, heavy engagement with fantastical narratives can influence their expectations and causal reasoning about the real world (Woolley & Ghossainy, 2013; Skolnick Weisberg & Sobel, 2022). The internalization of a 'magical solutionism' script, as documented in our linguistic analysis, risks fostering

an unrealistic optimism about problem-solving ease. When real-world challenges inevitably require sustained effort and tolerance of failure, contradicting the media model, this can lead to the negative outcomes implicated in our analysis: frustration, disappointment, and feelings of inferiority when personal efficacy falls short of the modeled ideal. This aligns with the "Differential Susceptibility to Media Effects Model" (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013), which suggests that such effects are not universal but are strongest for viewers whose personal characteristics, such as personality traits, cognitive style, or developmental stage, make them more receptive to these particular messages. Therefore, while not universally occurring, the show's regressive pedagogical discourse creates a predictable risk factor for undermining healthy problem-solving mindsets and emotional resilience.

This dependency is mutually reinforced by the semantic patterns. The pervasive use of absolutist language (42.5%), particularly universal quantifiers ("*every*," "*never*" - 26.0%), constructs a discourse that eliminates nuance and frames problems in binary terms of good vs. evil (Fairclough, 2003). This fusion of emotional lexicon (41.4%) and absolutist language, co-occurring in 22% of cases, creates an affective truth regime (van Dijk, 2006) where feeling ("*I feel it's right!*") is equated with knowing, and affective certainty validates dogmatic claims. This promotes the mindset which trains young viewers to valorize instinctive certainty over reflective inquiry and to believe complex problems can be resolved without sustained effort or strategic thought.

### **Naturalizing Social Hierarchy and Marginalizing Agency**

The linguistic evidence substantiates the critique that the series implicitly constructs and naturalizes a rigid social hierarchy. The discourse legitimizes the authority of a chosen elite, individuals selected not for their skills but by an arbitrary external authority (the Guardians) and passively endowed with unique access to power. The near-exclusive use of active voice (91.4%) in self-referential assertions ("*I'll solve this!*") linguistically reinforces Ladybug's role as the sole, innate agent, while the ordinary class is portrayed as inherently unequipped and disqualified to solve problems. This dynamic is reinforced by the pragmatic patterns where the high frequency of dismissive negation ("*Don't overthink it!*" at 16.8%) acts as a discursive tool to suppress alternative perspectives or independent action from ordinary citizens, who are instead instructed to trust the system. Any such independent action is narratively villainized, requiring purification. This trains viewers to accept hierarchical power structures as natural and unquestionable.

### **A World of Urgent Time and Hostile Space: The Erasure of Deliberation**

The linguistic patterns reveal how the show constructs a specific narrative world defined by pressure and danger. This world has two defining features: a relentless sense of time and a threatening type of space. First, time is always urgent. The narrative is trapped in a perpetual, high-pressure *now*. The data shows an overwhelming dominance of the present tense (68% of utterances), which linguistically keeps every problem feeling immediate and every solution needing to be instant. This is constantly reinforced by dialogue like "*I don't have time to think!*"

There is no narrative room for the past—only 9.8% of utterances are in the past tense. Even when the past is mentioned, it is not for genuine reflection but for a magical realization, as in the phrase "*The answer was right inside me all along.*" This line is not about cognitive effort; it suggests a pre-ordained, innate solution, reinforcing the theme of magical destiny over learned skill. There is even less room for the future, as shown by the near-total absence of conditional structures (<1%), which are the fundamental building blocks for hypothetical planning and collaborative brainstorming.

Second, space is almost always hostile. The action unfolds not in a safe classroom or a collaborative workshop, but on a chaotic battlefield in Paris under immediate threat. This dangerous space justifies the urgent time; in the middle of an attack, swift instinct is rewarded and hesitation is punished. The setting itself makes the authoritarian commands seem like a logical necessity.

The fusion of this urgent time and hostile space is ideologically powerful. It creates a narrative logic where the only valid way to be a hero is to act instantly and decisively on instinct. Deliberation,

collaboration, and careful planning are framed not just as inefficient, but as dangerous. This conveys the feeling of being under constant pressure which systematically erases the cognitive processes essential for genuine problem-solving.

This discursive move does not merely lack time for thought; it actively constructs thinking as a hindrance to the correct solution. The solution is framed not as something to be discovered through reason, determination, and cooperation, but as something to be accessed instantly through magic, intuition, or faith. Deliberation is thus positioned not just as slow, but as counter-productive, framed as a form of 'overthinking' that clouds instinct and jeopardizes success.

In conclusion, the linguistic patterns, namely the imperative dominance, the absolutist certainty, the emotional appeals, the dismissive negation, and the present-tense urgency, coalesce into a coherent and potent discursive model. This model is the vehicle for a regressive pedagogy (Freire, 1970) that prioritizes the transmission of fixed, magical solutions and unquestioning obedience to authority, thereby undermining inquiry, collaboration, and critical consciousness.

Therefore, *Miraculous Ladybug* exemplifies a miseducative experience (Dewey, 1938). It risks fostering pragmatic fossilization (Barón & Celaya, 2020) in L2 learners, limiting their functional communicative abilities to directive and assertive modes, and prioritizing instinct over critical inquiry. By presenting this ideology as natural and entertaining, the series exploits children's cognitive development to instill values that serve external interests, such as an uncritical trust in authority (Kellner & Share, 2019), ultimately limiting their capacity to develop critical media literacy. The following section proposes a pedagogical framework to address this paradox directly.

### Addressing the Tensions through Critical Pedagogy

The findings of this analysis present a clear paradox for language pedagogy. *Miraculous Ladybug* like many other popular animations offers a rich source of comprehensible input, yet its problem-solving paradigm particularly is fundamentally at odds with the principles of real world problem-solving in general and established language teaching methodologies such as TBLT in particular. This divergence is not incidental but is encoded in the very linguistic structure of the series.

TBLT is grounded in engaging learners in authentic, collaborative problem-solving that requires negotiation of meaning, hypothesis testing, and metacognitive reflection. *Miraculous Ladybug*, in contrast, promotes a top-down, instinct-driven approach that actively discourages the cognitive processes TBLT seeks to foster. The implications of these divergences extend beyond immediate classroom practice, pointing to potential long-term adverse effects on learner development.

To address the miseducative discourse and regressive pedagogical consequences, a multi-faceted, constructive, and deliberately designed pedagogical approach is necessary. Rather than discarding a potent source of learner engagement, educators can implement a framework designed to critically mediate the viewing experience. This begins with input enhancement (Sharwood Smith, 1993), where teachers strategically highlight the series' linguistic deficits, such as its lack of conditionals and hedging, through contrastive analysis and explicit modeling of collaborative alternatives. This compensates for the input imbalance and raises learners' metalinguistic and critical awareness about pragmatic and ideological choices.

Simultaneously, the viewing experience can be structured around TBLT-informed media tasks. Pausing episodes before the climactic solution creates a problem-solving gap that learners must fill through role-play and negotiation, effectively forcing collaborative deliberation where the series offers none. Follow-up activities, such as directive transformation tasks (where students re-write the protagonist's commands as collaborative suggestions or hedged questions) and post-viewing reflection protocols (guiding learners to analyze the ethical implications of the solution and consider alternative, non-magical outcomes), further scaffold the development of metacognitive and pragmatic skills that the series systematically overlooks in its relentless promotion of oversimplified, immediate, absolutist, and magical resolutions that preclude negotiation and critical thought.

The critical TBLT framework proposed here is designed explicitly to counter the regressive pedagogy embedded within the series' discourse. Where *Miraculous Ladybug* models a top-down, transmissive approach, TBLT tasks require collaborative knowledge-building. The proposed activities, such as problem-solving gaps, directive transformation, and critical discussion, are fundamentally progressive pedagogical tools. They aim to transform the learner's role from a passive recipient of commands (as modeled by the show) into an active, critical co-constructor of knowledge and meaning, thereby neutralizing the show's regressive and miseducative influence.

Ultimately, this must be coupled with the development of critical media literacy (Kellner & Share, 2019). Guided discussions that deconstruct the ideology embedded in the language, such as questioning who holds the right to command and how emotion is framed as a valid substitute for reason, are essential. This critical lens empowers learners to become active consumers of media, capable of interrogating the ideological underpinnings of the entertainment they consume. By integrating these strategies, educators can harness the show's potent linguistic features such as its high-frequency vocabulary, formulaic chunks, and comprehensible input, while nullifying its adverse ideological effects transforming it into a tool for fostering the autonomous, socially conscious, collaborative, and critically aware language learners that modern progressive pedagogy demands.

### Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that *Miraculous Ladybug* presents both opportunity and challenge for L2 pedagogy. Through quantitative and critical discourse analysis, we have documented how the series' linguistically rich input promotes a problem-solving paradigm characterized by authoritarian directives, unquestionable certainty, and a systematic absence of collaborative deliberation. The central paradox lies in how the very features that facilitate formulaic language acquisition simultaneously encode an ideology of instinctual, non-negotiable authority inducing feeling of inferiority to the viewers.

Our findings answer key research questions by confirming that the show's linguistic patterns (RQ1) deviate fundamentally from authentic, TBLT-aligned problem-solving (RQ3, RQ4), posing tangible risks for learners' socio-pragmatic and critical thinking development (RQ2).

Rather than dismissing this influential resource, we advocate for a critical pedagogical pivot. The proposed framework through integrating input enhancement, TBLT tasks, and critical media literacy addresses RQ5 by demonstrating how educators can transform viewing into an active process of critical discourse analysis. This approach guides learners to notice linguistic absences, question authoritarian framing, and rewrite scripts to include negotiation and hedging.

Ultimately, this research contributes to SLA and critical media studies by arguing that language pedagogy cannot remain ideologically neutral. *Miraculous Ladybug*, through its miseducative discourse, teaches regressive ways of thinking; a modern language education must therefore cultivate critical discursive competence empowering students to analyze, deconstruct, and resist authoritative discourse while fostering truly collaborative communication practices in all kinds of media.

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