

## An Analysis of Conflict Discourse in Season 3 of *Succession* from the Perspective of Proximization Theory

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**Abstract:** This paper takes the conflict discourse in the third season of the American TV series *Succession* as its research object, employs Piotr Cap's Proximization Theory as the analytical framework, and adopts a qualitative research method to explore how the characters in the drama use proximization strategies to construct discursive opposition amidst power struggles and family crises, as well as to analyze their pragmatic functions. The study finds that the characters frequently apply spatial, temporal and axiological proximization strategies to frame their opponents as an imminent and dangerous "external threat", so as to strengthen their own positions, strive for the right to speak and achieve communicative goals. The use of proximization strategies not only drives the plot forward but also profoundly reveals the dynamic power relations among characters and participates in constructing the identities of the parties involved in the conflict. This study expands the application scope of Proximization Theory from political discourse to TV drama discourse, verifying the strong explanatory power of this theory in analyzing conflict discourse within families and businesses, and enriches the research approaches of critical discourse analysis and pragmatics. Meanwhile, it profoundly demonstrates the role of language in interpersonal conflicts and organizational power struggles in real society, which is of great significance for understanding the construction of power discourse and its social impact.

**Keywords:** Proximization Theory; Conflict Discourse; *Succession*; Discourse Analysis

### 1. Introduction

As a drama depicting the power struggle within the media empire family, the American drama *Succession* has a sharp language style, dense

dialogue, and is full of games and confrontations. The third season continued and deepened the conflicts within the family, especially after Kendall Roy publicly accused his father, Logan Roy, the conflict broke out in full. The dialogue between the characters shows the struggle for power and the negotiation of relationships. As a common language phenomenon, conflict discourse not only reflects the contradictions between the two sides of communication, but also reflects the value systems, power relations and pragmatic motivation behind it.

Proximization Theory was proposed by Polish scholar Piotr Cap, which is an important theoretical tool in the analysis of critical discourse. Initially, it was mainly used to analyse how to construct external entities into imminent and threatening existences through language strategies in political discourse, so as to provide legitimacy for one's own behaviour. The core of the theory is to emphasize the opposition of "us" (inside) and "them" (outside) through the three dimensions of space, time and value, so as to "proximate" the threat to mobilize the audience to take action or agree with a certain position. Since the theory was put forward, scholars have extensively explored its application and expansion. In his early research, Cap systematically built an analytical model of Proximization Theory, and focused on applying it to political discourse fields such as war on terrorism and immigration policy, revealing how the government can defend the legality of national security policies and military operations through spatial, temporal and axiological dimensions [1,2]. Since then, the scope of research has continued to expand. Hart and other scholars have combined Proximization Theory with cognitive linguistics to explore the cognitive process of threats being activated and constructed in the minds of the audience [3]. In the Chinese academic community, Pan Dong, Wu Jianguo and others introduced and commented on Proximization Theory, and

explained its value and research method as a new path for Critical Discourse Analysis [4,5]. With the deepening of research, the application field has also extended from pure political discourse to media discourse and business discourse, such as crisis reporting, corporate crisis public relations and many other contexts involving conflict and legitimacy construction. However, it is still a relatively novel attempt to apply this theoretical system to the dialogue of film and television dramas, especially the conflict discourse analysis of power struggles within family enterprises.

The family struggle in *Succession* is essentially a micro-war over corporate control, family loyalty and personal legitimacy. In order to occupy a moral and strategic high point in the conflict, the characters in the play need to constantly construct the behaviour of their opponents as a threat to the survival of families, companies and even individuals. Proximity Theory shows a unique applicability in this context. Its spatial dimension helps to analyse how business rivals or external regulation is shaped into an invasive entity threat by discourse. The temporal dimension can reveal how historical negligence or future risks are transformed into immediate crises. The axiological dimension can be used to analyse how moral, emotional and value-based differences are amplified into irreconcilable confrontations. Therefore, applying Proximity Theory to the conflict discourse analysis of *Succession* can not only expand the scope of application of the theory, but also provide a novel perspective for us to understand the complex discourse strategies, power games and identity construction processes of the characters in the play. Based on this, this paper chooses the third season of *Succession* as the research corpus, aiming to explore how proximity strategy is specifically applied in the conflict discourse of *Succession* Season Three and what pragmatic functions the use of these strategies has.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

Proximity Theory was developed on the basis of the Discourse Space Theory (DST) proposed by Polish scholar Piotr Cap in Chilton [6]. It focusses on how the speaker manipulates the listener's perception of "threat" through verbal means. The entities or concepts that were originally far away in space, in the future in time, and different in value are expressed as an

immediate danger that is approaching the internal centre and endangering one's own security and values. The core of this theory is to build an "Inside Deictic Center" (IDC) centered on "us" and an "Outside Deictic Center" (ODC) represented by "them". The inside centre is usually built to be safe, moral and protective, while the outside centre is built to be dangerous, evil and destructive. The key is how the speaker conceptually brings the threat of the ODC to the IDC closer through language strategy, making it urgent and real at the cognitive level. Thus, it provides rationalization for the legitimization of defensive or pre-emptive actions against the ODC, such as physical confrontation or verbal confrontation. In the family and commercial war of *Succession* this kind of action often manifests as public accusations, complex alliances and betrayals, fierce legal proceedings, and intense public opinion offensives. Therefore, Proximity Theory perfectly fits the analysis of the discourse game carried out by the characters in the play to compete for control.

Cap specifically divides the proximity strategy into three dimensions: spatial, temporal, and axiological. Spatial proximity is the most basic and intuitive dimension. It describes external entities through language as constantly approaching and invading or even encircling the internal centre in physical or conceptual space. This kind of proximity can be realized through specific direction words, moving verbs, etc. For example, in the play, the behaviour of a character "entering" the company's headquarters or "approaching" to the core of power can be constructed by the opponent as a spatial invasion that cannot be ignored. Temporal proximity is to bind the threats posed by the ODC to an extremely urgent time frame. By manipulating the time indicator, it brings the future and potential threats closer to "present" or "immediate", thus creating a strong sense of timeless crisis, forcing the audience to make decisions or take action immediately. The expressions such as "action stations" frequently used by the characters in the play are the embodiment of the temporal dimension. Axiological proximity refers to the opposition at the level of values and morality. Through discourse, the values, beliefs and codes of conduct of the ODC are constructed as completely contrary to the core values of the IDC, irreconcilable, and corrosive and destructive. Such as describing the other party's behaviour as

“betrayal” or “poisoning the soul of the company” are strategies to completely deny the other party from the moral level and mobilize the audience to unite based on common values.

Applying Proximization Theory to conflict discourse analysis provides a clear path for us to understand how the two sides of communication can compete for micro-power through language. In the conflicting dialogue of *Succession*, the participants are often the outside centre of each other. They all try to position themselves as legitimate representatives of the inside centre, and construct the other party as a dangerous and imminent threat. The primary function of this discourse strategy is to legitimize its aggressive and confrontational behaviour. By shaping the other party as a provocative, one’s own counterattack, reprimand and even betrayal are logically transformed into reasonable and necessary acts of self-defence. Furthermore, the proximization discourse is constantly delineating and renegotiating the boundaries between “us” and “them”. In the turbulent environment of the Roy family’s alliance, the characters constantly explore, attract and oppose through convergent discourse, thus redefining the relationship between enemies and friends.

At the same time, these strategies are strongly aimed at stimulating the audience’s inner fear, anger and sense of crisis, so as to influence the audience’s rational thinking. Make the audience more emotionally inclined to accept the speaker’s point of view, so as to win crucial support for him in a complex power game. In summary, Proximization Theory analyses the complex and sharp conflict discourses in the *Succession* with a clear spatial-temporal-axiological three-dimensional analysis framework, which enables us to cross the surface of language and gain insight into the dynamic changes in the relationship between power and characters hidden behind it.

### **3. Research Methodology**

This chapter outlines the research questions, data collection procedures, and analytical objectives of the study.

#### **3.1 Research Questions**

Based on Piotr Cap’s Proximization Theory, this study takes the third season of the American TV series *Succession* as the analytical corpus to explore the use of proximization strategies in conflict discourse within the drama. It primarily

addresses two research questions: (1) how are proximization strategies applied in the conflict discourse in *Succession* Season Three? (2) What pragmatic functions do the uses of proximization strategies serve?

#### **3.2 Data Collection**

The corpus for this study comes from the third season of the American TV series *Succession*. Using a qualitative research method, through viewing, repeated reading, and analysis of the script text, conflict discourse segments with obvious characteristics of antagonism, argumentation, and power struggles were selected. These segments primarily involve intense verbal confrontations between the protagonist Kendall Roy and family members (such as his father Logan Roy and his siblings Shiv, Roman, Connor) as well as company executives (such as Tom and Gerri).

#### **3.3 Research Objectives**

This study aims to describe the specific linguistic realizations of spatial, temporal, and axiological proximization strategies in the conflict discourse of *Succession* Season Three, and then conduct an in-depth analysis of the pragmatic functions these proximization strategies achieve in specific contexts, such as attacking opponents, defending oneself, manipulating public opinion, and constructing identity. Ultimately, it seeks to reveal how proximization strategies function as a crucial tool of power in the complex character relationships and intense power struggles within the drama, thereby deepening the understanding of power construction and maintenance in conflict discourse.

### **4. Analysis of Conflict Discourse in *Succession* Season Three from the Perspective of Proximization Theory**

The analysis of conflict discourse under the Proximization Theory mainly revolves around the three dimensions of spatial, temporal, and axiological. As shown in table 1, the characters in the drama employ a series of specific linguistic strategies to construct the opposing party as an approaching threat, thereby achieving their communicative goals.

The following sections provide a detailed analysis of these three dimensions of proximization strategies, using specific dialogue excerpts.

**Table 1. Analytical Framework of Proximization Strategies and Their Manifestations in *Succession***

| Dimension                 | Core strategy                                         | Linguistic Realizations                                                               | Typical Examples from <i>Succession</i>                                                              |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Spatial Proximization     | Constructing external threat as spatially approaching | Use of locational words, verbs of motion, container metaphors, territorial vocabulary | “plant a flag”<br>“that rat steps one foot inside this building”<br>“weevils in the flour sack”      |
| Temporal Proximization    | Constructing threat as temporally urgent              | Use of urgent temporal adverbials, militaristic terminology, present continuous tense | “Action stations!”<br>“in the next 30 minutes”<br>“they are coming up”<br>“release to media tonight” |
| Axiological Proximization | Constructing threat as axiologically opposed          | Use of moral criticism, political labels, illness metaphors, evil symbolism           | “rotten cabal”<br>“sanctimonious bullshit”<br>“misogynistic rants”<br>“the devil”                    |

#### 4.1 Spatial Proximization

In the power struggles depicted in *Succession*, space is not merely a physical backdrop but a core site continuously defined, contested, and reconstructed through discourse. The spatial dimension of Proximization Theory is skillfully used by characters to construct the boundaries of “us” and the threat of “them”, expressing power conflicts as a survival war related to territory and invasion.

Example 1:

Kendall: Okay. Action stations. Let’s go, let’s get into this.

Karolina: And where are we going, Ken?

Kendall: Waystar, plant a flag, fix on my lawyer, PRs, get some independent directors shaking, and maybe ride in to see the Feds.

At the beginning, Kendall said with a sentence full of military conquest, “Waystar, plant a flag, fix on my lawyer, PRs, get some independent directors shaking, and maybe ride in to see the Feds.” He announced his strategic intentions. This symbolic “flag” is not only a declaration of his return to the core of his father’s power, but also his attempt to forcibly delineate an IDC of his own on the territory absolutely controlled by Logan. This action is a challenge to the existing spatial order, marking his impact from a marginalized ODC to the centre of power. In the face of the impact, Logan, the guardian of the existing order, reacted fiercely.

Example 2:

Tom: there’s talk that, uh, Kendall’s planning to come in.

Logan: You’re kidding? In here? That rat steps one foot inside this building, I’ll punch him in the nose, okay?

His roar, “That rat steps one foot inside this building, I’ll punch him in the nose, okay?”

accurately reflects the core of spatial proximization. He used the physical space of the company building as the last position of the IDC, and stigmatized Kendall as a “rat” (ODC) trying to invade, and expelled him with violent “punch him in the nose”. This kind of discourse not only clears the border between the enemy and friend, but also simplifies the complex conflict between business and family into an easily understood territory defence battle, thus stimulating the fighting spirit of own camp.

The application of spatial proximization is not limited to power symbols and physical space struggles, it is also deeply applied to maintaining the purity within the team.

Example 3:

Kendall: Look. I need a sealed unit here, Karolina. I need a clean jar. So... so... are you in for this revolution?

Karolina: No, I know it's exciting. And, and I...I...I s...

Kendall: Are you with me, yes or no?

Karolina: Why did you do it like that, Ken? I mean, did you know?

Grey: Me? No. No. No, I had no prior warning and I was surprised at his comments, but now I am obviously concerned and interested to hear more.

Karolina: Okay.

Kendall: This is a fork in your life, Karolina. This is the righteous vehicle.

Karolina: It’s just not... It's not...

Kendall: Okay. Stop the car.

Kendall: Out. Out. Please. I need to make calls.

Karolina: Ken.

Kendall: I can’t have weevils in the flour sack, okay? Out. Now.

When Kendall fails to win over PR director Karolina, he accuses, “I can’t have weevils in the flour sack, okay? Out. Now.” Here, Kendall

metaphorically presents his emerging power group as a sealed container that must remain pure – the “flour sack”. Any member showing hesitation, disloyalty, or potential threat is constructed by him as “weevils” that corrode and destroy the overall quality from within – an internal ODC. Through this discursive strategy, he conducts an internal purge, strengthens team boundaries, and ensures the consistency of the IDC in value and action.

When a party feels threatened by a more powerful external force, spatial proximization strategies are used for strategic retreat and the construction of an external safe zone.

Example 4:

Shiv: Uh, Gerri. Are you okay?

Gerri: Yeah, great. All good. Just gonna go talk to Hugo. Because now, we’re gonna go, it looks like in the first instance, to Sarajevo.

Shiv: Sarajevo?

Gerri: I think Michelle-Anne freaked him out. Other places to consider. Roman: Bahrain, Bosnia, Kuwait, Lebanon, Maldives, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Vatican?

Shiv: Okay. What do all these countries have in common?

Roman: They’re all made up? They’re lands with dragons!

Shiv: No, I imagine that none of them have an extradition treaty with the U.S.

Roman’s explanation after Logan and his team decide to fly to Sarajevo, “I imagine that none of them have an extradition treaty with the U.S.”, reveals the spatial logic of this decision. Sarajevo here becomes a carefully chosen, temporary IDC, its security stemming from its geographical and legal-spatial distance from U.S. jurisdiction (the ODC). This action is a reverse move of Proximization Theory, through physical displacement, it actively distances the approaching, powerful ODC (legal sanction) conceptually, thereby creating a safe space for itself. However, this positioning itself inversely confirms that the original IDC (the U.S., Waystar headquarters) is no longer safe, and the threat from the ODC is real and approaching in space. The manifestation of spatial proximization also appears when FBI agents arrive at Waystar headquarters with a search warrant.

Example 5:

Gerri: Well, I guess the Government isn’t a Pez dispenser .You don’t push a button and something pops out the other end.

Loagn: Yes, I am well-aware. There’s about 20 of them down there. Why don’t we just ask them if they can come back tomorrow?

Gerri: Logan, they are coming up, and if you don’t open the door, they will kick it in. And if you don’t open the filing cabinet, they will pull out a crow bar.

Gerri’s description, “they are coming up, and if you don’t open the door, they will kick it in. And if you don’t open the filing cabinet, they will pull out a crow bar.”, paints a picture of state power as an ODC violently and irresistibly invading the IDC. “Coming up” indicates directional proximity, while “kick it in” and “pull out a crow bar” vividly depict the violence and destructiveness of this intrusion. At this moment, the legal conflict completely transforms into spatial conquest and subjugation, symbolizing the breach of the boundaries of Logan’s kingdom, and the insecurity brought by spatial proximization reaches its peak.

#### **4.2 Temporal Proximization**

In the power games of *Succession*, time is compressed and distorted through discursive strategies by the conflicting parties, creating a continuous state of crisis and urgency for action. The core of temporal proximization strategies lies in pulling future, potential risks into the present, making them immediate crises that must be addressed instantly to avoid catastrophic consequences.

Example 6:

Roman: Action stations. Strategy meet.

The military password used by Roman is “Action stations.” It is the embodiment of this strategy. This term, which originated from the navy, instantly elevated the commercial struggle to a state of emergency of military conflict. It implies that the enemy’s (ODC) attack is imminent, and any delay or slacking may lead to the collapse of the entire army. This sense of time urgency of militarization is also reflected in commercial operations.

Example 7:

Logan: Karl, I need to talk to the top 12 shareholders in the next 30 minutes. An emergency board meeting ASAP and they’ll be rolling through tiil next week, okay?

Karl: Yeah.

Logan’s order to Karl at the crisis response meeting “I need to talk to the top 12 shareholders in the next 30 minutes”. The reaction time of the capital market has been

compressed to an unreasonable limit. The “next 30 minutes” here is not just a time point. It is a kind of discourse construction, shaping the dynamic process of shareholder support into a blitzkrieg that must be fought for every second. Any communication beyond this time may be regarded as a failure, thus further aggravating the internal sense of crisis.

Example 8:

Lisa: Hello? - Lisa.

Kendall: Lisa! The Regal Legal Eagle.

Lisa: Kendall, I hear you’re going in.

Kendall: Yeah. I can’t let him dominate the battlespace, Lisa. My sister is making moves, I can’t just watch it happen. What... what’s the story on my immunity?

Lisa: I’m figuring out a “Queen for a Day” Situation, Kendall.

Kendall: I have to have control here.

Lisa: Yeah, but we’re losing the momentum.

Furthermore, Kendall’s complaint in lawyer Lisa, “I can’t let him dominate the battlespace, Lisa... we’re losing the momentum,” which deeply reveals his the irreversible cognition of time. “Momentum” is a physical concept, which is metaphorically used here as the power and advantage of moving forward in time. Claiming that it is “losing the momentum”, that is, claiming that ODC (Logan) is regaining the initiative of time. And IDC’s (Kendall) time is decreasing, which provides a reasonable reason for his possible more risky and radical behaviour.

When external legal entities intervene, temporal proximization is mandatory. In the face of the FB’s execution, Gerri’s description of “they are coming up” (Example 3) uses the present continuous tense, which is an extremely powerful language means of temporal proximization. It no longer describes the possibility of a future, but states an unstoppable process that is unfolding. This choice of language deprives the Logan team of all the time to react and space for maneuver, transforming the judicial threat into a physical entity that is steadily advancing over time and approaching step by step. On the battlefield of public opinion, time is also used as an offensive weapon.

Example 9:

Shiv: Well, I think a formal response really draws a line under it. I’m sure you’re being asked, so this is just us very clearly saying that we’re not a part of Kendall’s thing. What? You would have to say it’s accurate.

Cornor: Yeah, accurate like Oswald was accurate.

Shiv: I want us all to sign it for release to media tonight.

Cornor: I mean, it’s kind of ... It’s kind of a greeting card from hell.

Shiv: What?

When promoting the signing of an open letter against Kendall, Connor emphasised “I want us all to sign it for release to media tonight.” The “tonight” here is a carefully selected time point. It aims to use the immediacy of the news cycle to launch the fastest counterattack against Kendall’s accusations. And suppress the other party’s voice at the first time, control the right to speak, and shape the reality in favour of IDC.

### 4.3 Axiological Proximization

Axiological proximization is the most profound level of conflict discourse in *Succession*. Characters not only compete for power and interests but also for the right to define morality, discursive legitimacy, and the moral high ground of human nature.

Example 10:

Kendall: Amazon is 20 years old. Gates is an old geezer. Detoxify our brand and we can go supersoni. So what do you say? Are we interested?

Roman: You know, there’s just something about betraying our father that just doesn’t sit well with me.

Kendall: He’s a central player in a rotten cabal that has basically eaten the heart out of American democracy.

Roman: Rotten cabal is a good name for a band.

Shiv: He’s not gonna be on trial for that though, Ken.

Kendall: Well, maybe he should be.

When Kendall tries to win over his siblings, he accuses his father: “He’s a central player in a rotten cabal that has basically eaten the heart out of American democracy.” He elevates Logan from a specific individual and corporate faults to the level of a “rotten cabal” capable of devouring the “heart of American democracy”. Through this discourse, he defines the value of the ODC (Logan) as the erosion and destruction of the core values of the IDC (America, democracy, the public), thereby legitimizing his own personal revenge and desire for power. Facing this axiological attack, Logan’s counterattack is also worth analyzing.

Example 11:

Kendall: Okay? Well, tell him, that I'm gonna run up off the beanstalk.

Jess: Okay. Logan? Yeah, he says in that case he's going to run up off the, uh, beanstalk? He's kind of laughing. But not, like, nice laughing.

Kendall: Just tell him he should step back and cooperate. I don't want to see him behind bars. We may no longer be on the same side, but I don't want that.

Logan: That's bullshit. That's sanctimonious bullshit. It was a play. It was a play, it was a move. So, don't act like a cunt to me because it won't wash!

Jess: Okay, bye.

In his phone with Kendall, Logan roars, "That's sanctimonious bullshit. It was a play. It was a play, it was a move." It is to fundamentally question the authenticity of Kendall's axiological proximization. Logan refused to enter Kendall's "justice and evil" and tried to pull the conflict back to his familiar, naked power game. In his discourse system, the "move" of power is real, while the cloak of morality (sanctimonious bullshit) is hypocritical and despicable, which is a kind of ODC behaviour. This axiological counterattack aims to deconstruct the legitimacy of the opponent, making the moral accusations of the opponent empty and ridiculous.

Example 12:

News: But honestly, nothing could be as brutal as the open letter his own sister released. I am deeply concerned for the wellbeing of my brother. Our entire family has supported him through his many attempts. At rehabilitation for his multiple addictions. But the events of the last days have made it clear that our hopes for his recovery were misplaced. I've now been a direct witness to his misogynistic rants and comparisons to world historical figures that were suggestive of grandiose and disordered thinking. And I would ask that people give my brother privacy and consideration during this difficult time. And that's from his sister and she's the nice one.

The open letter signed by Shiv represents an extreme form of axiological proximization. She labels Kendall's expressions and appeals as "misogynistic rants" and signs of "disordered thinking". This strategy transforms axiological divergence from a debate over right and wrong into a distinction between sanity and insanity. Kendall is completely expelled from the IDC of normal people and credible family members, and

reduced to an ODC worthy of sympathy and isolation.

Example 13:

Shiv: But I would say, what dad did to you... the sacrifice, that was cold.

Kendall: Well, I don't know. From his point of view, it made sense. I mean, who else was he gonna choose? Unless, you know, he took responsibility himself.

Shiv: Well, yeah.

Kendall: So...

Shiv: So? I get it. You were angry.

Kendall: Yeah. I... I know. I just... Look, the situation was the situation. I felt I had no choice.

Shiv: Come on, Ken. That was self-aggrandizing bullshit. It was a peacock show.

In a private confrontation, Shiv's accusation against Kendall, "That was self-aggrandizing bullshit. It was a peacock show," employs another deconstructive approach. She reduces Kendall's grand narrative of overthrowing a corrupt culture to personal, superficial vanity ("self-aggrandizing") and a flamboyant performance ("peacock show"). This implies that Kendall's value claims lack sincerity and are essentially for self-display, thereby weakening their moral force.

Example 14:

Lisa: Okay. So, I should, um, make it clear this is just a preliminary. So, no confidential information.

Kendall: Sure. Sure. Well, look, what can I tell you? Uh... my dad's the devil. He runs a crime ring, and I would love to hire you because you're a super star and I think you can take down my dad, and this will be the case of the century and the highlight of your career.

Lisa: Okay.

In the most private setting, facing his lawyer, Kendall uses the most extreme axiological label to define his father: "Uh... my dad's the devil. He runs a crime ring, and I would love to hire you because you're a super star and I think you can take down my dad and this will be the case of the century and the highlight of your career." He identifies Logan as "the devil", the most evil symbol in Western culture, pushing axiological proximization to its extreme. Combined with the accusation of a "crime ring", he completes a value construction from "a flawed father" to "an incarnation of absolute evil". Through this discourse, he completely transforms a morally grey family business dispute into a battle between light and darkness, thereby seeking

value legitimacy for any extreme legal measures he might take.

## 5. Pragmatic Functions of Proximization Strategies

This chapter discusses two major pragmatic functions of the identified proximization strategies: the construction and contestation of power relations, and the negotiation of identity.

### 5.1 Construction and Contestation of Power Relations

Proximization strategies in the conflict discourse of *Succession* are not mere rhetoric, they are core tools for exercising power, constructing, and challenging power relations, profoundly affecting the status, resources, and scope of action of the conflicting parties. Kendall, through a series of axiological proximization strategies. For example, his claim in public statements and on social media, “We must overthrow the culture of corruption that silences women”, successfully turns a power struggle into a moral crusade, thereby seizing the legitimacy for action. Once he defines the conflict as a confrontation between “righteous reform” and “corrupt culture”, all his radical and even destructive behaviors, including publicly accusing his father and launching a proxy fight, are legitimized, enabling him to challenge and subvert the power structure established by Logan.

In response, the Logan camp uses proximization strategies to consolidate its own power. Logan himself directly refers to Kendall as “the snake” and issues the prohibition, “No one talks to the snake, no.” This simple directive, by defining Kendall as a dangerous, insidious ODC, has multiple pragmatic functions. First, it completely demeans the opponent emotionally and morally. Second, it draws clear enemy and friend boundaries within his own camp, any violation of the prohibition will be seen as betrayal. Finally, it deprives Kendall of the possibility of resolving conflicts or gaining support through dialogue and negotiation, thus maintaining Logan’s absolute authority and control over the sphere of influence as a big head. This consolidation of power is also reflected in his use of Roman. He commissioned Roman “Keep an eye on, huh? I trust you.” And give “You’re number one, kiddo.” The verbal reward. The external threat (Kendall) built here has become the tritstone to test and strengthen internal

loyalty. By giving Roman a symbolic priority (number one), Logan cleverly used the sense of crisis brought about by proximization to restrain his subordinates and consolidate the center of power with himself as the core.

Proximization strategies also become a powerful means of psychological manipulation. Under immense legal and time pressure, Tom proposes to Logan that he can be the “fall guy”, self-objectifyingly describing himself as “Just clonk the trout on the head and put it in your pouch.” This reflects how external threats force individuals into extreme self-sacrifice to gain survival space within the power structure. Furthermore, when responding to Shiv’s inquiry about the scandal, Logan excuses the transgressions by stating, “Shiv, the world is rough. We ran a cruise line out of some tin pot ports... Did we play rough with the odd union boss or some Moaning Minnie repeat litigant?” thereby downplaying the faults as mere common “play rough”. This demonstrates how the power class uses discourse to shift focus and maintain its position by blurring and generalizing the ODC.

### 5.2 Identity Construction

In intense conflicts, proximization strategies are crucial means for characters to negotiate and construct identity. Kendall is committed to reshaping his self-identity from a former addict to the driver of the “righteous vehicle” through axiological proximization. Although his motives are constantly questioned by opponents and even the audience, dismissed by Logan as “sanctimonious bullshit”, his attempts to display a sense of justice and humility through declarations like “I am your puppet” to his lawyer are core components of his identity construction in the struggle for power and moral legitimacy.

The process of Shiv’s identity construction is more complex and full of tension. She has long been oscillating between multiple identities such as loyal daughter, political operative and heir apparent who longs to be recognized. In the end, she chose to sign the open letter defining Kendall as having “misogynistic rants” and “disordered thinking”, completing the value binding with her father’s camp and temporarily stabilizing her identity as the guardian of family interests. But on the other hand, it may sacrifice the image of independence and progress that she has been trying to pursue. Roman habitually uses

cynical mockery to deal with conflicts. For example, calling Greg “my chief of staff, leggy princeling of ATN.” This unique style of speech is itself an identity mark, which is used to cover up the inner insecurity. And he said, “He taught me how to aim my peepee in the toilet”. Refusing to sign an open letter for such a childish and private reason reveals an identity based on primitive emotions and blood connection, which refuses to completely cut values.

Tom’s identity change is particularly remarkable. He said, “I don’t even have a job title”. Under the great legal and survival pressure, the adherent evolved into a “I’ll step up and go down” to his father-in-law. The “desperate survivalist”. His identity changes completely with the pressure of the centre of power. Logan, as the core of power, has always been committed to maintaining the authoritative identity of Creator and Family Totem. Even at the moment when the FBI broke in and seemed to be the most direct challenge to power, he finally said “Cooperate”. The instruction is not a simple surrender, but more like a strategic control. The identity of the strong is still being maintained, showing the core position of identity construction in power discourse.

## 6. Conclusion

This study analyses the conflict discourse in the third season of *Succession* with the framework of Proximity Theory. The study finds that the characters in the play used a lot of proximity strategies. These strategies include spatial proximity, temporal proximity and axiological proximity. Characters frequently use these strategies in power struggles and family conflicts. They realise multiple pragmatic functions such as attacking opponents, defending themselves, manipulating public opinion and building identity by constructing their opponents into “external threats” that are spatially invasive, temporally urgent, and axiologically opposed. From theoretical perspective, this study further verifies the applicability of the theory in complex interpersonal interaction and the explanatory power discourse analysis by applying the Proximity Theory to the

conflict discourse analysis in film and television texts. Proximity is not only a discourse strategy. It reflects the core role of language. Language participates in power construction and identity consultation. In the progress of the plot, the characters constantly adjust the boundaries between “internal” and “external”, emphasising the immediacy of the crisis and the irreconcilability of value. These discourse operations show how language participates in and shapes dynamic power relationships.

From practical perspective, this study is enlightening for understanding the complexity of character relationships, the variability of discourse strategies and the mechanism of power operation in *Succession*. Proximity analysis helps reveal the process of emotional mobilization, moral struggle and identity construction behind the conflict discourse, so as to deepen the understanding of the behavioural motivation of the characters in the play and the logic of plot development. In addition, the study also provides a reference for observing the operation mechanism of power discourse in real society, especially on how to build legitimacy and consolidate identity through language in family, organization and public discourse.

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