

THE ACTS OF STEREOTYPING IN TAYLOR'S *THE HELP*: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC APPROACH

TINDAKAN STEREOTIP DALAM FILM BERJUDUL THE HELP KARYA TAYLOR: PENDEKATAN SOSIOLINGUISTIK

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Abstract

This study focuses on the stereotype phenomena found in a multicultural society as portrayed in *The Help*. The study first described the linguistic choices reflecting stereotypes. Second, it presented the situations that lead to stereotype threat in *The Help*. This study employed the qualitative method. The finding of the study shows that, first, all types of linguistic choices reflecting stereotype are found, namely Descriptive Action Verbs (DAVs), Interpretive Action Verbs (IAVs), State Verbs (SVs), Adjectives (ADJs), and Noun as Group Categories (NGCs); second, all characters in the movie experienced all situations that lead to stereotype threat, i. e. group identity salience, minority status, stereotype salience, and evaluative scrutiny.

Keywords: sociolinguistics, stereotype, Taylor's *The Help*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini berfokus pada fenomena stereotip yang terjadi dalam masyarakat multikultural seperti yang digambarkan dalam The Help. Tujuan pertama penelitian adalah menggambarkan pilihan linguistik yang mencerminkan stereotip. Tujuan kedua, menyajikan situasi yang mengarah pada ancaman stereotip dalam The Help. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif. Penemuan dalam penelitian, pertama, semua jenis pilihan linguistik yang mencerminkan stereotip ditemukan, yaitu Verba Tindakan Deskriptif (DAV), Verba Tindakan Interpretasi (IAVs), Verba Penegasan (SVs), Ajektiva (ADJs), dan Noun sebagai Grup Kategori (NGCs). Kedua, semua karakter dalam film mengalami semua situasi yang mengarah pada ancaman stereotip, i. e. arti penting identitas kelompok, status minoritas, arti-penting stereotip, dan pengawasan evaluatif.

Kata kunci: sosiolinguistik, stereotip, film *The Help*

INTRODUCTION

Living in a multicultural society is not easy. There must be some conflicts between people since there are many differences among them. A multicultural gap is the biggest problem that people should note while living in a diverse race and culture. For many group ethnic members, being

stereotyped can become a threat. Members of minority groups tend to be treated differently in the countries and societies where they live (Wiviana: 2014).

The Help is one of the representations of the stereotype threat phenomenon as the results of stereotypes related to the racial issues. This movie was

produced in 2011. The movie is derived from a novel with the same title written by Kathryn Stockett. It is a story that is based on a reality that happens in Mississippi during the Civil Rights Movements, which begins in August 1962 and ends in late 1964. The story is about a woman named Eugenia Phelan (Skeeter), who returns from college and decides to become a writer. She works at a publishing company. During her career, she decides to write a book containing interviews of the black women who have spent their lives taking care of prominent southern families (white families).

The preceding studies done related to stereotype is written by Candra entitled *A Sociolinguistic Analysis Of Stereotypes In Remember The Titans* (Candra, 2011). The study discussed about stereotype by using language choices reflecting stereotype and the factors stereotype shaping; while the other is written by Fachrani entitled *Female Stereotype Presented in 'Cantiq' Tabloid* (Fachrani, 2013) which discussed about the meaning constructions conveyed in *Cantiq* tabloid headlines and the kinds of female stereotypes presented by *Cantiq* tabloid. Meanwhile, another study is written by Purnama entitled *The Reaction of The Society Towards The Racial Discrimination Seen in Lorraine Hansberry's A Raisin in The Sun: A Sociological Approach* (Purnama, 2015) which discussed about the kinds of racial discrimination towards African-Americans and the reaction of the society towards the

practice of racial discrimination as seen in Lorraine's Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*.

Different from the preceding studies, this study focuses on the stereotype phenomenon as portrayed in *The Help* which leads into two main problems: linguistic choices reflecting stereotypes and situations that lead to stereotype threat. The first problem then explained further as figured by the dialogue transcript uttered by the characters. Then the second problem is revealed in four category namely group identity salience, minority status, stereotype salience, and evaluative scrutiny.

The reason why stereotype is being studied is because nowadays stereotype phenomenon become a big problem in society. However, there are a lot of people who do not aware of how the stereotype works in their society. Therefore, by analyzing stereotype, the researcher can present to the readers on how stereotype works so that the readers could be more aware of stereotype phenomena that happen in their society.

This study is aimed to broaden readers' knowledge of social and cultural study, particularly in relation to the phenomena of stereotype threat that exist in society, and gives an authentic source of study in order to conduct a thesis writing using sociolinguistic approach and to give a description about the phenomena of stereotype threat.

RESEARCH METHOD

Type of The Study

This study used qualitative method since it gave an emphasis on describing the phenomena of the use of language in its context by interpreting the data.

Time and Place of The Study

This study is written from August 2017 up to July 2018 in Yogyakarta.

Subject of The Study

The subject of the study was *The Help* movie.

Data, Instrument, and Data Collection Techniques

The data was in the form of words and phrases taken from conversation of the characters in the movie *The Help*. The main instrument in the study was the researcher herself supported by the data sheet. The data of the study was collected by watching the movie, identifying the characters' utterances, recording the data into the data sheet, interpreting the utterances, and finally deriving conclusion based on the result of the research.

Data Analysis

After the data were collected, selected, and also reduced, then they were analyzed. The steps are: Identifying, Coding, Interpreting, Discussing, and Concluding.

DISCUSSION

Linguistic Choices Reflecting Stereotype

a. Descriptive Action Verbs (DAVs)

This type is usually used to express a single, observable event and preserve perceptual features of the event. DAVs refer to a single specific action which a clear beginning and end, and with a physically invariant feature (Coenen, 2005). DAVs provide a concrete and objective description of a specific behavioral event. These verbs maintain a reference to context and situation (Semin and Fiedler, 1992: 121). In addition, all actions to which a specific DAV can be applied share a common physically invariant feature. For example, all actions that can be described as *to talk* involve the mouth as a physically invariant feature.

The conversation is illustrated in Extract (1) below.

The example is illustrated between Hilly and Minny, as seen in extract 2.

- (1) HILLY : Minny are you in there?
MINNY : Yes, ma'am.
HILLY : And just what are you doing there?
MINNY: (*turning on the flush of the toilet*)
HILLY : (*screaming*) **Get off** my toilet! *Ugh...* You're fired, Minny Jackson!

The phrase *get off* uttered by Hilly above indicates that Hilly does not want to see the presence of her maid, Minny, in her house anymore. It indicates that she is uncomfortable with her since Hilly caught her using Hilly's toilet. Furthermore, *get off* can be applied as DAVs because it is a kind of behavior that has a clear beginning and end and it uses legs as the physical invariant

feature in which the legs are moving from one place to another.

b. Interpretive Action Verbs (IAVs)

IAVs refers to a multitude of behaviors or actions that have the same meaning, but do not share an invariant physical aspect (Semin and Fiedler, 1992:139).

(2) SKEETER: Maybe we should just build you a bathroom outside, Hilly.

HILLY : You ought not joke about the colored situation. I'll do whatever it takes to **protect** our children. Your lead, Elizabeth.

(Datum 8)

Datum 8 shows that a single word could be interpreted as a stereotype. The word *protect* above has a connotative meaning since it refers to black people. It has a connotative meaning that meant Hilly wants her children to be healthy and does not want them to be infected with diseases since her family lives with black maids. It can be categorized as IAVs because *protect* does not share any physical invariant features, but it still preserves as a verb.

c. State Verbs (SVs)

State Verbs refer to mental and emotional states or changes into particular things. These verbs refer to either a cognitive (to think, to understand, etc.) or an affective state (to hate, to admire, etc.) (Semin and Fiedler, 1992:144). In the same way, SVs are an unobservable emotional state and not a specific event (e.g., "A hates B").

(3) ELIZABETH: Hilly, I wish you'd just go use the bathroom.

MS HILLY : I'm fine.

MRS WALTERS: Oh, she's just **upset** because the nigra uses guest bath and so do we.

(Datum 1)

The word *upset* above can be said as having a connotative intention. That kind of word is uttered because it expresses Hilly's feeling in which she is not comfortable with black peoples' attitudes. That word is classified into SVs because it refers to a psychological consequence of an action that does not have a clearly defined beginning and end, and cannot be objectively verified. As an action, it expresses an emotional consequence of an action rather than referring to an actual action. Moreover, it is categorized as SVs because *upset* is regarded as mental and emotional states or changes into particular things. It is chosen because it contains an ironical meaning in its context.

d. Adjectives

Adjectives show a low contextual dependence and a high conceptual interdependence in their use. In other words, the use of adjectives is governed by abstract, semantic relations rather than by the contingencies of contextual factors (Semin and Fiedler, 1992: 143).

MINNY: You cooking **white**¹

food, you taste it with different spoon. If they see you put the tasting spoon back in the pot, might as well throw it all out. Spoon, too. And you use the same cup, same fork, same plate every day. And you put it up in

the cabinet. You tell that white woman that's where you're gonna keep it from now on out. Don't do it and see what happens. When you're sewing **white**² folks coffee, set it down in front of them. Don't hand it to them, 'cause your hands can't touch. And don't hit on they children. White folks like to do they own spanking. And last thing. Come here. Look at me. No Sass-mouthing. No Sass- mouthing. I mean it.

(Datum 19)

The use of the word *white* in the conversation above indicates that Minny feels uncomfortable with everything related to 'white'. People who stereotype tend to use a specific term instead of proper name or actual name. It is categorized as out-group stereotyping in which black people stereotype white people. Furthermore, the word *white* can be categorized as ADJs because it abstractly qualifies white people's behavior from black people's point of view. Actually, in black people's point of view, white people are associated with people who are arrogant and selfish, so they often feels uncomfortable in living with them. As a result, they always call white people with adjectives addition, such as *white*.

e. Noun as Group Categories

Linguistic choices reflecting stereotypes are in the form of not only verbs and adjectives, but also nouns (Semin and Fiedler, 1992: 121). Nouns can under certain conditions also qualify a person. These can be the case when a noun refers to a mentioned

person. Noun as Group Categories are used to assign a person to noun category and refer to a mentioned person such as jack, German, lesbian, nigger, and Jew.

Most of the characters in the movie often used nouns to stereotype or to label another group. The examples are presented as follows.

(4) ELIZABETH: Hilly, I wish you'd just go use the bathroom.

HILLY : I'm fine.

MRS. WALTERS: Oh, she's just upset because **the nigra** uses the guest bath and so do we.

(Datum 2)

The use of NGCs is clearly seen in the example above. The phrase *the nigra* is classified as NGCs because it qualifies a person or a group of people. in this case, the use of *the nigra* qualifies black people, particularly the black maids who work as maids and babysitters in Hilly and her friends' house.

The phrase *the nigra* is categorized as noun group. Instead of calling 'colored people', white people also often call black people 'the nigra' which associated with bad people.

Situations that Lead to Stereotype a. a . Group Identity Salience

Group identity salience is a situation when there is someone in a particular ethnic community becomes the stereotypical representation of an ethnic group's image. Group identity theory refers to groups where there is an established social

community and in-group stereotypes. The differences that distinguish groups into some characteristics such as color of skin, wealth, education, and occupation make a clear separation in society.

(21) MRS PHELAN : Great. You can write my obituary.
"Mrs Phelan Phelan dead. Her daughter still single."

SKEETER : Mother, would it really be so **terrible** if I never met a husband?
(Datum 10)

In those days, according to the parents, became a spinster is a disgrace for the family.

It is categorized as group identity salience. Skeeter is the one who becomes the stereotypical representation of her group's image which assumes that every girl should be married as soon as possible, even though they are still young. In that era, white girls have to be married as soon as they graduated from college. For them, it will look terrible if a girl is late in marriage.

b. Minority Status

According to Schaefer, minority status can be described as a situation when there is a subordinate group whose members experience a narrowing of opportunities (success, education, wealth, etc.) and have significantly less control or power over their lives than members of a dominant or majority group (1993: 5-10). This theory is in line with Marger (2011: 28) who states that

minority status can be happened to those people who live in multiethnic society and receive fewer of the society's rewards especially to their physical and cultural traits.

(23) SKEETER : We love them and they love us, but they can't even use the toilets in our houses. Don't you find that **ironic**, Miss Stein?

MISS STEIN: I'm listening.
(Datum 12)

The word *ironic* stated by Skeeter is used to express her sympathy for black people, especially who work as maids or babysitters. The bonding between a child and her/his babysitter is strong. However, they do not receive the equal facility in white people's house. They do not receive an equal facility because they are discriminated as being minority group.

c. Stereotype Salience

In everyday social interaction, people tend to categorize other people based on their self- categorization and social status. Personal's identities can become threatened when stereotypes are invoked, either blatantly or subtly, in the social community (Steele et al., 1995: 198).

(25) AIBILEEN: Miss Hilly was the first of **the babies** to have a baby. And it must a come out a her like the eleventh commandment. 'Cause once Miss Hilly had a baby, every girl at the bridge table had to have one, too.

(Datum 34)

It can be said as stereotype salience since black people stated that white ladies are

babies because most of them married and having babies in the very young age. Therefore, they cannot look after their children properly.

d. Evaluative Scrutiny

It is situations in which an individual believes that his or her ability in a stereotypical domain will be evaluated can create a strong sense of group identity and stereotype threat.

The example of an evaluative scrutiny situation that lead to stereotype threat is presented in the extract below.

(27) HILLY: I knew she was **a thief** the day she started. A nigra walks into a pawn shop with a ring of such size and color? It took them all of ten minutes to find out where she worked.

The true story that happens is different from what is told by Hilly. Yule Mae, her maid, accidentally finds Hilly's ring under the sofa when she cleans up the house. Unfortunately, Hilly thinks that the ring is lost and finds out that the ring is in Yule Mae. Hilly reports the incident to the police which makes Yule Mae being arrested. It is because black people are always associated with criminal things and most of them are coming from the lower educational background. In fact, this situation could really make Yule Mae attach in the negative idea of *a thief* because her performance in working as a maid is blatantly evaluated by the household who actually white woman and comes from the superior group. According to the theory of evaluative

scrutiny, someone performed worst when his/her ability was evaluated by the dominant group.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusion

The conclusions of this study are as follows: First, all the types of linguistic choices reflecting stereotype are found, namely Descriptive Action Verbs (DAVs), Interpretive Action Verbs (IAVs), State Verbs (SVs), Adjectives (ADJs), and Noun as Group Categories (NGCs). Those categories are in the form of words and phrases which contains issues of the phenomena of stereotype which happen either in in-group or out-group society. Noun as group categories (NGCs) is the first most-appearing phenomenon. It is because 'nouns' are mostly used by the characters in the movie. Nouns can be effectively used to be one of the ways to label or mark people who are stereotyped. In addition, they provide rich linguistic resources to characterize people. Moreover, adjective (ADJs) is the second most-often appearing words. Adjectives is less significant to mark the stereotyped group because it is quite difficult to stereotype a group by their disposition. On the other hand, State Verbs (SVs), get the lesser significance since it only happens as a reference to a single specific event. Meanwhile, the other categories of linguistic choices reflecting stereotype that are found in the movie are Descriptive Action Verbs (DAVs) and

Interpretive Action Verbs (IAVs). Both of them are least significant since the abstract words are less representative to convey the intention of stereotype. Furthermore, most of linguistic choices reflecting stereotypes found in this movie are in the out-group category of stereotype. It signifies that racism affects the characters to stereotype another group or minority group.

Second, related to the situations that lead to stereotype threat, there are four classifications of the situations, namely group identity salience, minority status, stereotype salience, and evaluative scrutiny. Based on the data findings, all the characters in the movie experienced all situations that lead to stereotype threat. Moreover, the most widely accomplished situations that lead to stereotype in the movie is minority status. It is because people who live in a multicultural society or a diverse area tend to receive less society's reward especially to their both physical appearance and cultural traits. Therefore, they are really potential to experience stereotype threat. Furthermore, stereotype salience is the second most-often appearing situation, followed by group identity as the third, and the fourth is evaluative scrutiny.

It can be concluded that the phenomena of stereotype are well portrayed in the movie since all the types of linguistic choices reflecting stereotypes and situations that lead to stereotype threat are found.

Suggestion

To readers in general, it is suggested to be more aware and should recognize about the phenomena of stereotype in their social community. They also need to put more attention to the study of sociolinguistics, especially that related to stereotype. It is important because sociolinguistics is the study of the relationship between language and society, and stereotype itself is very closely related to the social conditions. Meanwhile, to future researchers, the researcher suggests that they could conduct research related to effects of stereotype threat and mechanisms behind stereotype threat which are not analyzed in this research.

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