

A SOCIOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN VERNACULAR ENGLISH USED BY THE MAIN CHARACTER IN *PRECIOUS* MOVIE

ANALISIS AFRICAN AMERICAN VERNACULAR ENGLISH OLEH TOKOH UTAMA DALAM FILM *PRECIOUS*

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Abstract

This research aims at identifying the variations of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) used by the main character in *Precious* movie, and at identifying the functions of utterances containing AAVE. This study applied qualitative and quantitative methods to analyse the data. The data were in the form of utterances spoken by the main character of *Precious* movie. The data were derived from the original transcript. Triangulation by theories and other researchers was applied to check the credibility of the data in this research. The result of the research reveals two important points. First, the main character in *Precious* movie employed all of six variations of AAVE: 1) copula deletion 2) habitual be 3) double negative 4) negative form 5) irregular verb and 6) verb inflection. From the six variations, verb inflection is the dominant variation manifested in the African American Vernacular English utterances in *Precious* movie. Second, four out of six functions of language found in AAVE in *Precious* movie. They are 1) emotive function 2) referential function 3) phatic function and 4) metalingual function. Referential function is revealed to be the dominant function used by the main character in *Precious* movie.

Keywords: sociolinguistics, African American Vernacular English (AAVE), *Precious* movie

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi variasi African American Vernacular English yang digunakan oleh tokoh utama dalam film Precious, dan mengidentifikasi fungsi dari ungkapan yang mengandung unsur AAVE tersebut. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode campuran kualitatif dan kuantitatif untuk analisis data. Data penelitian ini berupa ungkapan oleh tokoh utama dalam film. Data diperoleh dari transkrip asli film. Untuk memeriksa kredibilitas penelitian, peneliti menerapkan triangulasi menggunakan teori dan peneliti lain. Hasil dari penelitian ini menunjukkan dua poin penting. Pertama, tokoh utama dalam film Precious menggunakan semua enam variasi dari AAVE, yaitu: 1) copula deletion 2) habitual be 3) double negative 4) negative form 5) irregular verb dan 6) verb inflection. Dari enam variasi tersebut, verb inflection merupakan variasi yang paling banyak muncul dalam ungkapan yang mengandung unsur AAVE. Kedua, ditemukan empat dari enam fungsi dari AAVE dalam film ini, yaitu: 1) fungsi emotive 2) fungsi referential 3) fungsi phatic dan 4) fungsi metalingual. Fungsi referential adalah fungsi yang paling banyak digunakan oleh tokoh utama dalam film Precious.

Kata kunci: sosiolinguistik, African American Vernacular English (AAVE), film *Precious*

INTRODUCTION

Language is a social phenomenon that shows relationship between people through conversation. Sociolinguists explain there are some factors that influence the differences of language used by people (Labov, 1927; Yule, 1996). These differences are also a result of their environments or social contexts. Someone uses a different language for each different social condition. In sociolinguistics, it is known as language variations. Sociolinguistics differentiate four kinds of language variations, namely: standard variation, nonstandard variation, regional variation, and register.

Standard variation is a formal and polite form of a language. Standard English is an English text or speech which is correct in structure and grammar so we can easily get the meaning from it. Standard English is used or accepted as normal or average. It is the form of English language widely accepted as the usual correct form and it is usually used in educational environments by people who have good educational background.

Nonstandard variation or *sociolect* is the informal and mixed form of language. There is a term *dialect* in the nonstandard variation which refers to all differences between varieties of language. Nonstandard English is an English language that is usually used outside educational environments. Here, Nonstandard English means one that is thought to be characteristic of the speech of persons with little education — a term that is

often regarded as a marker of low social status.

African American Vernacular English (AAVE) is one of varieties of English language that is considered as Nonstandard English. AAVE are mostly used by black people in the United States (Jokinen: 2008). The development of AAVE is related to the slavery in the United States.

In this study, the researcher focuses on AAVE that is used by the main character in *Precious* movie. The variations of AAVE is well represented in this movie. *Precious* is 2009 drama movie directed by Lee Daniels and produced by two movie's executive producers, Tyler Perry and Oprah Winfrey. It is based on a popular novel entitled "Push" by Sapphire. The main character in this movie is Claireece Precious Jones or simply "Precious", starred by Gabourey Sidibe. This movie is about black teenager trying to escape from her hard life. Precious tells a life story from an African American girl and AAVE is the main language used in almost entire scenes of the movie. Precious is the representative of AAVE's native speakers. She delivered strong characteristic of AAVE in her utterances.

There are several reasons why the researcher chooses this movie as an object of study. First, it tells the story about Precious, a young African American girl who suffers from her hard life. In expressing her everyday conversations, Precious used AAVE. Second, *Precious* movie fulfills the requirements for the characteristics of AAVE. The other

characteristics of AAVE being used by black people are lower education background and lower social class. Precious is a 16 years old girl who is kicked out from her regular school because of pregnancy. She has difficulty in reading and understanding every subject taught by her teachers. AAVE utterances spoken in *Precious* movie are also studied based on the functions of using those expressions. Therefore, it is interesting to analyse the variations of AAVE employed in this movie.

RESEARCH METHOD

Type of Study

This research employed a mix method, the combination of qualitative and quantitative method. The main method used is descriptive qualitative method, supported with quantitative method.

Time and Place of the Study

The study is written from August 2017 to August 2018 in Yogyakarta

Data, Instrument, and Data Collection Techniques

The main data for this research are the conversations or utterances containing AAVE by the main character. Then the supporting data are the context of those utterances to see the functions of the character's utterances that contain African American Vernacular English in *Precious* movie. The primary instrument of this research is the researcher herself while the secondary instrument is the data sheet. The process of classifying the data is following

some steps such as: watching *Precious* movie, read the transcript of the movie, giving highlight to something related to the usage of AAVE, and classifying the dialogue containing AAVE.

Data Analysis

The researcher divides the analysis into three kinds. The first is analyzing the classified data sheet based on a sociolinguistics. It consists of analyzing the characteristic of AAVE that is used by the main character using Chaika's theory. It also used to find out the functions of using AAVE utterances by the main character using Jakobson' theory. The second is triangulating the data to avoid errors. The last is drawing the conclusion.

DISCUSSIONS

1. Variations of African American Vernacular English

a) Copula Deletion

1) "Gonna"

Gonna stands for *to be + going to* in the Standard English.

PRECIOUS :

Everyday I tell myself something **gonna** happen, like I'm gonna break through or somebody gonna break through to me -I'm gonna learn, catch up, be normal, sit in the front ...someday.

The utterance "**I tell myself something gonna happen,...**" has the equivalent of "**I tell myself**

something is going to happen,...” in the standard form.

2. Copula Absence

It refers to the absence of verb in the sentence.

PRECIOUS :

I like Mr. Wicher. I pretend **he my husband** and we live in Weschesser, wherever that is. I can see by his eyes Mr. Wicher like me too. I wish could tell him all the pages in my book look the same to me, but I can't..

This datum reflects the use of copula absence. The utterance **“I pretend he my husband and we live...”** is not grammatically correct. It should be changed into **“I pretend he is my husband and we live...”** to become standard.

b) Habitual Be

Habitual be is the use of copula *be* in AAVE to show habitual and durative action.

PRECIOUS:

I always be fallin like that when my mind be wanderin. Mama say gonna fall to my death one day. Wonder what that be like?

This utterance does not tell an action which is happening at that time. Thus, the meaning of the sentence is that Precious always falls like what has just happened when her mind is wandering.

c) Double Negative

The use of two forms of negative words at the same sentence.

PRECIOUS (V.O.): I like maff but **I don't say nuffin'**-don't open my book even. Just sit there.

The characteristic of double negative forms used by Precious is the use of combination of *don't* and *nothing*. Both words are negative. The sentence **“I don't say nuffin' (nothing)...”** means that Precious does not say anything. The use of double negation is to convince the listener or viewer about what Precious has said. Therefore, referring to the form of Standard English, the sentence **“I don't say nuffin' (nothing)...”** is grammatically incorrect and based on Standard English should say **“I don't say anything..”** or **“I say nothing..”**

d) Negative Form

The characteristic of negative form found in *Precious* the movie is the use of *ain't* to replace “to be + not” in a simple sentence.

PRECIOUS (V.O.): Jo Ann like the spotlight and can't sit still. Teacher don't need no outside policin' tho. **She ain' 'fraid.** I wonder what is a record layer anyway.

The utterance **“she ain' 'fraid...”** should be in the form of present tense. It tells about Precious'

thought about her friend, Jo Ann. This utterance is grammatically incorrect. It has a singular subject so the appropriate form of “be” that is needed is “is”. The equivalent expression to the utterance “**she ain’ fraid**” is “**she is not afraid**”

e) Irregular Verb

PRECIOUS: **My grandmover Toosie, brangs Little Mongo** over on days social worker so it look like Mongo live wif us. Then my mama get the check 'n food stamps for me 'n Little Mongo. But it's my baby. Little Mongo is money for me, not her!

The characteristic of irregular verb found in the datum is the wrong use of past tense irregular verbs. The utterance “**my grandmover Toosie, brangs Little Mongo...**” means that Precious’ grandmother brought her daughter on the day of social worker so that Precious’ mom got money from that action. This utterance uses the wrong word to construct the standard form of past tense. It should use the word “brought”, which is the right past tense form of “bring”. The whole standard form for that utterance is “**my grandmother Toosie, brought Little Mongo...**”

f) Verb Inflection

One of the characteristics of verb inflection is subject-verb agreement.

MS. RAIN: Yes it is. My favorite color is purple...

PRECIOUS (V.O.) : Sumthin' different wif dis lady. **She like to sing**. I wish I could sing. Go to church. Sing on a choir. Mama say ain't no God. Dis lady remind me Mr. Wicher but more a man and like Miss Lichenstein 'cept not a cuckoo. Dress like she ride in out the village too.

The sentence “**She like to sing..**” is grammatically incorrect. This sentence has a third person singular subject “she” in the form of present tense, so the predicate should be followed with –s ending. To create a grammatically form, the sentence should be changed into “**She likes to sing..**”

2. Functions of AAVE utterances by the main character of *Precious* movie

a. Emotive Function

The expressive function is used to express the speaker’s feelings.

PRECIOUS (V.O.): **I am happy to be writing**. I am happy to be in school. I am happy to know my baby coming soon. Don't see the sense in pretending I am not pregnant anymore. I am also thinking about lil Mongo a lot. Miz Rain say we gonna write everyday, that mean home too.

This utterance is said by Precious in her classroom. Precious writes in her notebook and all of other girls do the same. She likes to write and to be in school with Miss Rain and her friends. Precious just finds a new home for her life. The

utterance shows Precious' feeling, that she is happy. It implies the use of emotive function.

b. Referential Function

The referential function is used to provide the utterances in a language with messages or information.

PRECIOUS: Plus she say who wanna see me dancing anyway. I goes to I.S. 111.In Harlem. New York. Today I was almost late. That'd a been a problem.

The utterances in the datum employed the use of Referential function. From the utterance, the viewer gets a message and information that Precious goes to I.S. 111 in Harlem, New York, which is her school, and she was almost late that day. The viewer should be convinced with the scene showing that Precious goes to her school. The referential function of this utterance is to give information to the viewer.

c. Phatic Function

The phatic function is used to show solidarity and empathy to others.

PRECIOUS (V.O.): Miz Rain right too. For sure, **these girls is my family now.** They visit me at hospital when I had Abdul and even take up a collection when Mama kick me out. They got love in they eyes and in they hearts for me, same as I got for them.

The utterance in the datum shows Precious' agreement with

Miss Rain's statement of her empathy to Precious' life. Miss Rain and her girl friends in her class is her family for now because they share the same fate.

d. Metalingual Function

Metalinguistic function is used to give a comment to any use of language, for example in utterances.

PRECIOUS (V.O.): Miz Rain say I was moving through the vowel 'n consonant sounds faster than even Rhonda Johnson was.

The utterance in that datum illustrates the use of metalingual function. This utterance happens when Precious learns to read and she remembers about what Miss Rain said about her. The metalingual function in Precious' utterance shows that Miss Rain gives a comment about how fast she produces vowel and consonant sounds when she learns to read.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the findings and discussion section in the previous chapter, the conclusions are stated as follows.

1. The first objective of the research is to identify the variations of African American Vernacular English that is used by the main character in *Precious* movie. All of six of the variations of AAVE are found, they are copula deletion, habitual

Be, double negative, negative form, irregular verb, and verb inflection. Each of the variations has their own characteristic. The first variation of AAVE is copula deletion which is categorized into the use of “gonna” and copula absence. The second variation of African American Vernacular English uttered by the main characters is habitual be which is only characterized by on the misuse of “be”. The third variation of AAVE is double negative, which discussing the use of combination of *ain't*, no, nothing, and other negation in a negative utterance. The fourth variation of AAVE is negative form which deals with the misuse of *ain't*. The fifth variation of AAVE that is found is irregular verb, which shows the use of irregular verb related in the form of past tense. The last variation of AAVE appear in *Precious* movie is verb inflection, which deals with the misuse of verb related to subject-verb agreement. From the six variations, Verb Inflection is the dominant variations manifested in the AAVE.

2. The second objective is to identify the functions of utterances containing AAVE in *Precious* movie. Following the findings in chapter IV, four functions of using AAVE are performed by the main character in the movie. They are emotive function, referential function, phatic function, and metalingual function. Conative and poetic functions are not present. From these four functions, the

dominant function is referential function. This is due to the fact that Precious, the main character, mostly speaks through voice over. It provides more information and message rather than expressive conversations.

Suggestions

The result of this research may be a reference to the following research. There are still very few researchers who are interested in studying African American Vernacular English. Therefore, it will be very challenging for other researchers observe the same subject of the research with different objectives or methodology.. Furthermore, the future researchers can employ different theories and approaches in order to enrich the analysis. In addition, they can also study African American Vernacular English by using other setting such as talk show and etc.

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