

**SOCIAL FACTORS AND SOCIAL DIMENSIONS IN THE LANGUAGE OF
FREEDOM WRITERS' CHARACTERS REFLECTING RACISM IN THE UNITED
STATES OF AMERICA**

A THESIS SUMMARY

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A. INTRODUCTION

Human communicates through language that is delivered in interaction in a society. By communicating through a language, people can deliver their thought, emotion, ideas, and feeling. Language also reflects social and cultural phenomena that occur in the society. Language can involve many issues that are usually popular at some situations. In relation to multicultural society, there are many people who use intercultural communication in their way to interact to each other. It is because they have different cultures which influence their language. There are many problems that appear in intercultural communication which sometimes lead to a conflict. One of the problem is the differences between races. It will lead to racial segregation which usually arises in terms of skin color, power, and wealth. Therefore, racial issue becomes a crucial issue in some countries, including the United States of America.

The way a person utilizes language is affected by many factors, such as social factors and social dimensions. The social factors consist of the participants of the interaction, the setting or social context of the interaction, the topic of the interaction and the function of the interaction. Besides, social dimensions are also important in analyzing the interaction among people. They are social distance scale, status scale, formality scale, and two functional scales: referential and affective scales. These kinds of language can be found in the *Freedom Writers* movie which involves racism issue in the United States of America.

- **Research Objectives**

In reference to the research focus above, the objectives of this research are:

1. to describe the social factors in the characters' language that reflects racism in *Freedom Writers*, and
2. to describe the social dimensions in the characters' language that reflects racism in *Freedom Writers*.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH METHOD

1. Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistics is the study of the relationship between language and society, how language functions in a community, how people in community use language as well as how this language usage reflects the social identity of the users.

2. Language, Society, and Culture

Language is the main element in human life used for communication. Wardhaugh (1992: 1) says that language is what the members of a particular society speak. Society is any group of people who are drawn together for a certain purpose or purposes (Wardhaugh, 1992: 1). Moreover, there is a culture that cannot be separated from the living process of human being. Holmes (2001: 333) defines culture as positive politeness on solidarity oriented culture value involvement with others.

3. Speech Community and Language Varieties

The term “speech community” is widely used by sociolinguist to refer to a community based on language, but linguistic community is also used with the same meaning (Hudson, 1980: 25).

4. Intercultural Communication

In a multicultural society, it is possible to have communication among cultures called as intercultural communication. Jokinen in *Contextual Inferences in Intercultural Communication* (1994: 1) mentions that intercultural communication happens as the result of different contact and social aspect and has a connection with social roles. In an intercultural communication, someone should consider social roles as well.

5. Social Factors

a. Participants of the interaction

People generally talk differently to children and to adults although some adjust their speech style or “accommodate” more than others (Holmes, 2001: 225).

b. Setting or social context of the interaction

There are many aspects of the social context that can contribute to deciding which linguistic variety is to be employed on a particular setting (Trudgill, 1974: 106). The speech of individuals varies in the code according to the occasion or social context in which they are speaking.

c. Topic of the interaction

Holmes (2001: 25) argues that people may select a particular variety or code because it makes them easier to discuss a particular topic, regardless

of where they are speaking. People somehow attempt to establish one main topic so that the communication runs well.

d. Function of the interaction

Holmes (2001: 259-260) offers a number of ways of categorizing the function of speech. They are: expressive, directive, referential, metalinguistic, poetic, and phatic.

5. Social Dimensions

a. Solidarity or social distance scale

The speaker may be judged to speak “better” or “worse” than other speakers who have much the same background (Wardhaugh, 1992: 49). Moreover, Holmes (2001: 175) adds that when they belong to the same group, people often speak similarly.

b. Status or Power Scale

Holmes (2001: 135) adds that class divisions may be based on some status differences such as social prestige, wealth, and education. In western society, a status generally derives from the material resources a person can command, such as family background, independently of wealth, and educational level. Those who are superior have a high status and those who are subordinate have a low status.

b. Formality scale

A very formal setting, such as a law court, also will influence language choice regardless of the personal relationship between the speakers (Holmes, 2001: 9). People may also try to relate the level of formality chosen to a variety of factors: the kinds of occasions, various social backgrounds, and emotional involvement of one or more of the participants (Wardhaugh, 1992: 48).

d. Functional scale: referential and affective

Language can convey objective information of a reference; and it can also express someone’s feeling (Holmes, 2001: 10). In referential scale, there are high information content and low information content. In affective scale, there are low affective content and high affective content. However, interactions that are more concerned with expressing feelings often have little in the way of communicating new information.

7. Racism in the United States of America

The United States of America is a nation where many people from different cultural backgrounds can be found. The heaviest burdens of racism in the country have historically fallen upon Native Americans, Asian Americans, African Americans, Latin Americans, American Jews, Irish American and some other immigrant group and their descendants. White Americans occasionally do experience racial discrimination since other groups have less economic and social power. Racism in the United States became a crucial issue since slave and colonial era. Society distinguished races in different ways. They were separated in education, public facilities, employments, governments, housing, and so on. They were also judged by others by their color of skin, wealth, and physical appearance. In Long Beach, California, there is also a racism issue that became a crucial problem in the neighborhoods especially in the school. There are many gangs from different races which have conflicts. It is because they have a different perception about their America and they also have a negative perspective about white people as the superior race.

This study employed a qualitative method. This research also used content analysis to analyze the data. The data of this research were in the forms of words, phrases, clauses, or sentences, which are uttered by the characters in the film *Freedom Writers*, that expose the types of social factors and social dimensions reflecting racism in America. The primary source of data of this research was taken from *Freedom Writers*, a film of gangs' life in a multicultural society. The secondary data source was the transcript of the film *Freedom Writers* cited from http://www.script-o-rama.com/movie_scripts/t/freedom-writers-script-transcript.html. The primary instrument in this qualitative study was the researcher herself. This is based on what Moleong (2001: 121) says that, in qualitative research, a researcher is a planner, a data collector, an analyst, a data interpreter and a reporter of research results. For the secondary instrument, the researcher used data sheets to classify the characters' language use that can be the clue for analyzing the types of social factors and social dimensions represented in this film.

Sudaryanto states that there are some techniques or methods in collecting data; two of them are *Simak* and *Catat* (1993: 133-135). In analyzing the data, the

researcher followed some steps as presented by Bogdan and Biklen (1982: 145): working with the data, organizing the data and breaking them into manageable units, synthesizing them and making identification, analyzing the data, and drawing conclusion. Finally, the researcher confirmed the research to Erna Andriyanti, M.Hum. as the first consultant and Titik Sudartinah, M.A as the second consultant. This research was also triangulated by two friends of the researcher, Wulan Fitriana and Destyana Prastitasari. Both were students of English Education Department of Yogyakarta State University majoring in linguistics.

C. FINDINGS

Table 3 : The Social Factors in the Characters' Language of *Freedom Writers* Reflecting Racism in the United States of America.

No.	Social Factors	Findings	
1.	Participants	family	husband-wife
			father-daughter
		school	Classmates
			teacher-student
			teacher-teacher
2.	setting or social context	public	toy store
			Restaurant
			school yard
			School
			Classroom
			Prison
			Court
		private	boarding house
			Bedroom
			Apartment
3.	topics	racial segregation	different position
		race perspective	blacks' perspective, white perspective
4.	functions	expressive	
		directive	
		representative	

Table 4. The Social Dimensions of the Characters' Language in *Freedom Writers* Reflecting Racism in the United States of America

No.	Social Dimensions	Frequency	
1.	Solidarity Scale	High	4
		Low	24
2.	Status Scale	High	8
		Low	20
3.	Formality Scale	high	9
		low	19
4.	Functional Scales	referential	11
		affective	17

D. CONCLUSION

1. Social Factors in the Language of *Freedom Writers*' Characters Reflecting Racism

The research findings reveal that there are four elements of social factors. They are participants, setting or social context, topics, and functions of the interaction. The element of participants of the interaction is the most frequently occurring type in the film. It is influenced by the existence of the participants who belong to several races, i.e. Whites, Blacks, Latino, Cambodian and Chinese. They are classified into family and school participants. Family participants are present in the conversations between daughter-father, daughter-mother, and husband-wife. School participants are in the dialogues between teacher-teacher, classmates, and teacher-vice head of department.

Another element is setting or social context. In this movie, the setting consists of public and private places. The public places consist of toy store, classroom, restaurant, school yard, court, and prison. However, private places have lower frequency than public ones. Private places are boarding house, apartment, and bedroom. There are two of topics concerning racism that are found in *Freedom Writers*, i.e. racial segregation and race perspective. Racial segregation is seen in the utterances of *Freedom Writers*' characters that hate each other, while race perspective consists of blacks' and whites' perspective through the existence of other races and vice versa.

The last element is functions of the interaction. In this element, there are three kinds of functions which appear in the data, i.e. expressive, directive, and representative.

Expressive and representative are found mostly in the conversations between classmates and teacher-students. It is used to show the hatred feeling between each other. Directive is found in the conversation between teacher-teacher and teacher-students.

2. Social Dimensions in the Language of *Freedom Writers*' Characters Reflecting Racism

The second research finding shows that there are four dimensions initiating the characters' language in *Freedom Writers*. They are solidarity, status or power, formality, and functional scales. The first dimension is solidarity scale which is related to the relative intimacy between a speaker and a hearer. In *Freedom Writers*, high solidarity is seen in the dialogues among family participants which consist of daughter-father, daughter-mother, and husband-wife. Low solidarity, which is found in the higher frequency, is seen in the conversations among school participants who do not have intimacy among them.

The next dimension is status or power scale. In *Freedom Writers*, high status appears in the conversations between teacher and students, vice-head of department and students, and head of department and teachers. Low status is seen mostly in the students' utterances. Low status or power scale has a higher frequency than high status because the participants mostly consist of students who have lower status than the other school members. The next is formality scale which is the speaker can speak very formally and very informally depending on the setting or social context. In the movie, high formality is seen in the formal setting, such as at school and low formality in the informal setting, such as in an apartment, boarding house, and restaurant. Low formality has a higher frequency than high formality because there are many participants who come from different races who hate each other. The last dimension is functional scales which consist of referential and affective scales. In this movie, affective function has a higher frequency than referential one because the topics of the interactions are mostly about racial segregation and race perspective, so that the participants tend to share their feeling rather than to give information.

D. REFERENCES

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