An Analysis of Language and Social Class in the Movie "Once Upon a Time in Hollywood"

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ABSTRACT

This research was to analyze the relationship between language and social class in the movie Once Upon a Time in Hollywood. Language as communication can reflect a person's social identity and power. The research method used is a qualitative method with a literary study approach, and the theory used is Language and Social Class by Basil Bernstein. The results showed that there are factors that contain power, language style, and social identity. In conclusion, the language used in this movie shows the differences in social class and how they interact in society.

Keywords: language, social class, power, sociolinguistics, elaborated codes, restricted codes

INTRODUCTION

Language is the main human communication and an expression that contains certain meanings or intentions that aim to convey something to others. For example, in a community group, language is one of the factors that can bring out human feelings and emotions so that they get recognition. This recognition causes some people to make language a social class (Hayati, 2021).

Social class is used to describe groups in society. A social class group can be formed because language influences the community environment. The intensity of communication in society determines the rhythm of communication that can fulfill the same needs of all parties. Language and social class are also discussed in sociolinguistics (Ayu & Hadiwijaya, 2024).

In sociolinguistics, the general function of language is seen as social behavior used in social communication. Sociolinguistics has a relationship between language and social factors in a society. Sociolinguistics discusses more deeply the object of research on how language functions in society, as well as the human ability to speak appropriately and in diverse situations (Saifuddin et al., 2018). For example, a movie that brings language as a

social class to research.

In this research, sociolinguistic studies reveal how the language used shows identity or social class, including the movie that will be studied for its language use. Movies are often a media for language variation in society, as well as influencing the way audiences understand their characters (Hasanah et al., 2020).

Characters in movies can be a useful medium and a method of representing the real world in the past or present. Movies provide visual and narrative representations of historical events, social issues, and scientific concepts. It can bring complex ideas and concepts to life and make them more accessible and appealing to a wider audience. Movies have a unique power to capture people's attention because they have a variety of forms and approaches that can be conveyed to the public (Syahrul Huda & Solli Nafsika, 2023). This can be seen from the language used by the characters.

The characters in this movie reveal how language reflects social class. The study of the relationship between language and social class is often used to indicate a person's position in a group, community, or society (Bernstein, 1971). Movies can be a medium to illustrate how language differences can illustrate the social class that occurs in society.

This language difference occurs in the movie Once Upon a Time in Hollywood, which illustrates how social class occurred in the 1960s. The difference in ideology between social groups in the movie strongly reflects the interaction of formal language, slang, or social certification in the upper-middle and lower-middle-class society (Pangaribuan, 2019). It can be analyzed more deeply on how language is used to reflect social class in the movie Once Upon a Time in Hollywood.

The Movie Once Upon a Time in Hollywood is analyzed into the theory of Language and Social Class by Basil Bernstein. Bernstein divides language into two main types of codes namely Elaborated Code and Restricted Code. Elaborated Code, which is used by the middle and upper classes is characterized by using complex language structures, special word selection, and organized arguments. Restricted Code is typically used by the working class, and is characterized by short, informal, and contextual sentences, which rely on shared understanding (Bernstein, 1971). Both codes are found in the theory book and are included in the language and social class subchapters.

Bernstein discusses how language theory and social class have differences in language use that reflect and reinforce the social structure of class. By understanding the differences in language use between social classes, we can better understand the difficulties faced by people from different backgrounds and work to create greater equality in education and social opportunities. This led Bernstein to categorize both language codes and social classes (Bernstein, 1971).

In the language codes grouped by Bernstein that rely on shared understanding prove that the elaboration code emphasizes that the individuality and intention of the speaker can't be taken for granted, they require elaboration and specification of meaning. In addition, this code encourages vocabulary differentiation and outperforms various syntactic options. It is different from the speaker and centers on the experience of others. This code is used in social relationships where the intentions of others are unpredictable and must be clarified verbally (Bernstein, 1971). The elaboration code is different from the restricted code.

Restricted codes emphasize group or status similarity, so the speaker's intentions can be taken for granted and don't need to be explained further. It focuses on the experience or group and does not have many syntactic options. It is used in social relationships, where much is obvious, and there is no need for verbal clarification. With this theoretical approach, researchers are expected to gain new insights into how language is used to illustrate social class in movies, especially in the movie Once Upon a Time in Hollywood (2019).

The movie Once Upon a Time in Hollywood features characters with different social backgrounds and illustrates the Hollywood entertainment industry in the 1960s. Rick Dalton played by Leonardo DiCaprio uses formal and structured language to maintain his position in the industry. In contrast, a working-class stuntman, Cliff Booth played by Brad Pitt speaks casually and directly. As a representation of counter-culture, hippies use free language to show their disagreement with the conventions of society and also as a form of expression.

The movie reflects the social class of the characters, which influences their choice of language. In addition, the language in this movie is used as a tool to show the power that occurred in that era.

METHOD

This research uses a literary study, which means finding sources and constructing data from various sources, such as books, journals, and previous research. This qualitative research has a clear and easy-to-understand design so that it can be used as a research method (Fadli, 2021).

The research studied using this method is usually carried out in a setting or object in the form of events, social interactions or social activities. This method obtains a deep understanding of human and social problems, and explains or reveals what is the purpose or core problem in the object (Kelen et al., 2016).

The research object can be described by narrating the object to be studied. In addition, qualitative research refers to ideas related to description, such as meaning, definition, characteristics, metaphors, and

symbols. Factors that can clarify qualitative research are using theory (Firmansyah et al., 2021).

In qualitative research, theory is needed to assist researchers in formulating questions or making hypotheses to be tested. Therefore, qualitative research theory can be looked for and updated during research so that it can compare existing theories with newer theories (Firmansyah et al., 2021).

The theory that will be used in this research is the theory of Language and Class by Basil Bernstein. By using qualitative methods and also using Basil Bernstein's theory, the data obtained from the movie Once Upon a Time in Hollywood is observing conversations and interactions between characters that reflect social class differences between Rick Dalton played by Leonardo DiCaprio, Cliff Booth played by Brad Pitt and the hippie group. Bernstein's theory is used to see how elaborated codes and restricted codes show the dynamics of social class and power.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This research uses Basil Bernstein's Language and Social Class theory to reveal the relationship between language and social class in the dialog of the movie Once Upon a Time in Hollywood. Language is discussed with three main focuses: first, language as a reflection of social class; second, as social context and language style changes; and third, as language and power.

1. Language as a Reflection of Social Class
Rick Dalton is an actor from the upper-middle social class who is on the rise, so his language style and way of communicating show that he is used to speaking directly and clearly. This can be seen from the dialog below:

> *"So, Rick, explain to the audience exactly what it is a stunt double does." (Allen)*
> *"Well… actors are required to do a lot of dangerous stuff. Say Jake Cahill gets shot off his horse. Now can I fall off a horse?" (Rick)*

In the dialog, Rick Dalton as Jake Cahill answers Allen Kincade's question who interviews him with Cliff Booth, a stunt double who replaces him if there is a dangerous scene. There is the word *'actors'* which indicates that he is an actor, then he added the sentence *'Now can I fall off a horse?'*, The sentence seemed to emphasize that he could not do the scene of falling from the horse because he was a main actor. That's why he hired Cliff as a stunt double for him. Rick said the sentence very structured and clear, and his tone sounded relaxed so that the actor's aura was very visible. Rick continued his sentence:

> *"Yes, I can, and yes, I have. … But say I fall off wrong and I sprain my wrist or I twist my ankle. Now, that can put an undue burden on production because now maybe I can't work for a week. So Cliff here is meant to help carry the load." (Rick)*

Rick's sentence *'Yes, I can, and yes, I have'* shows that he can do the scene professionally, but Rick's follow-up sentence *'can put an undue burden on production'* explains that if he kept falling or other dangerous scenes, it would slow down the production process because he was the main actor, then the sentence *'So Cliff here is meant to help carry the load'* identifies that the dangerous scene could have been done by Cliff Booth who was hired by Rick to be a stunt double for him, to reduce things that are not desirable. In the dialog, Rick seemed to explain where his social class position was.

The reporter asked Cliff about his work. Cliff answered the question casually.

> *"Is that how you'd describe your job, Cliff?" (Allen)*
> *"What, carrying his load? Yeah, that's about right." (Cliff)*

The reporters chuckled at Cliff's answer. *'What, carrying his load'* dalam kalimat tersebut Cliff menjawab secara sederhana, santai dan sesuai dengan pernyataan Rick, that Cliff's job was to endure all the dangerous scenes for Rick.

In the conversation between Rick and Cliff, it can be seen that Rick uses the elaboration code because he has to explain the concept of stuntmen clearly to be more easily understood. This is what makes him speak openly. Meanwhile, Cliff uses a restricted code, where he doesn't need to explain in detail how his working-class position is and it is already clear to him.

2. Social Context and Language Style Changes

The dialog below shows the conversation between Rick and Cliff. Cliff asked Rick a question and he also told Cliff his complaints.

> *"All right, what's the matter, partner?" (Cliff)*
> *"Well… it's official, old buddy. I'm a has-been." (Rick)*
> *"What are you talking about? What did that guy tell you?" (Cliff)*
> *"He told me the goddamn truth, is what he told me." (Rick)*

Cliff approached Rick after handing over the parking ticket to the officer. The word *'partner'* indicates that Cliff changed his language style after realizing Rick came out of the restaurant with a look that did not look good and he asked him directly. The word *'old buddy'* shows that Rick familiarly answers Cliff's question and the word 'I'm a has-been' indicates that Rick feels that his career as an actor is not as great as it used to be and he speaks with a trembling and sad voice when he says it and doesn't care if a high-

class actor seems to cry in front of Cliff who is his replacement actor. Rick smokes a cigarette and leans his shoulder against Cliff.

> *"Whoa, whoa." (Cliff)*
> *"Oh, shit." (Rick)*
> *"Hey." (Cliff)*
> *"I'm sorry about that. I'm sorry about that." (Rick)*
> *"Here. Put these on." (Cliff)*

Cliff was surprised by Rick who cried and leaned on his shoulder and patted Rick's shoulder. The sentence *'I'm sorry about that'* shows that Rick feels embarrassed for crying and apologizes to Cliff because his clothes are stained with tears. *'Put these on'* the sentence shows Cliff giving his glasses to Rick so that he will not be embarrassed for crying.

> *"Don't cry in front of the Mexicans. Now, what's got you so upset, man?" (Cliff)*
> *"If coming face-to-face with the failure that is your career ain't worth crying about, then I don't know what the fuck is." (Rick)*

The sentence *'what's got you so upset, man?'* shows that Cliff asks Rick with simple sentences and he cares about Rick's condition. *'the failure that is your career ain't worth crying about, then I don't know what the fuck is'* in the sentence, Rick tells with sobs and swearing. He explains what he feels to Cliff, revealing that his career is a failure and it's something worth crying about. This shows that Rick Dalton uses the elaboration code to pour out his heart and create an emotional connection with Cliff, no matter if he is a middle-class actor who cries in front of his stunt double.

Cliff responded well and advised him not to cry and to keep his dignity. Asking why he was so angry, sad and upset. Cliff used limited code by providing support without getting carried away by Rick's emotional flow. Cliff's simpler response shows that he doesn't have a social need for such things, and maybe it's because he's just a stuntman.

3. Language and Power

This dialog begins when the Hippie group drives their noisy car in a luxurious residential area, one of which belongs to Rick Dalton. Rick, who was making alcohol, heard the sound of the car.

> *"Goddamn. Fucking private road. Damn property taxes up the butt. Goddamn.*
> *… Bunch of goddamn fucking hippies. What the fuck?" (Rick)*

Rick was grumbling because of the noise from the cars outside, the road area of his house was a private road and the noise was coming from the cars of a group of hippies. *'Fucking private road'* the sentence emphasizes that he owns and has private rights to the road or area. *'Damn property taxes up*

the butt' signifies his social status as the owner of the house or area. Then Rick's sentence, *'Bunch of goddamn fucking hippies'* shows anger and contempt for the lower-class people like the hippie group who have disturbed his elite area.

> *"Hey, you! … Yeah, asshole, I'm talking to you! What the hell do you think you're doing bringing that noisy hunk of shit around here at midnight?" (Rick)*
> *"This is a private road, all right? Who are you? And who are you here to see?" (Rick)*
> *"Nobody, sir. We just got lost and a little turned around." (Tex from the hippies)*
> *"Ah, horseshit." (Rick)*

The sentence *'Yeah, asshole, I'm talking to you!'* shows that Rick speaks in a loud voice to show his power, *'that noisy hunk of shit'* Rick's sentence shows that the lowly and ugly car belonging to the hippie group annoys him a lot, he asks the group of hippies who are in the car and why they are in the area at midnight. *'This is a private road'* Rick said the sentence loudly and emphasized his authority that the road area was a private road. One of the hippies named Tex explained in a low voice that they were lost and wanted to turn around.

> *"You fucking hippies came up here to smoke dope on a dark road, huh? Next time you want to try that, fix your fucking muffler." (Rick)*
> *"Look, we're really sorry we disturbed you." (Tex)*
> *"Look, chief, you don't belong here. Now, take this mechanical asshole and get it off my fucking street!" (Rick)*

Rick demeans and accuses the hippie group, then the phrase *'fucking hippies'* shows that Rick dislikes and sees the hippie group as a lowly social group and the phrase *'you don't belong here'* indicates that they should not be on the street because it is a private road area. *'get it off my fucking street!'* Rick continued to drive him away with harsh words even though Tex had apologized for disturbing the residents there.

CONCLUSION

Based on the data obtained in the movie Once Upon a Time in Hollywood above, it shows how humans involve language to show power, social class, or social identity. Through the theory of Language and Social Class by Basil Bernstein. This can be seen from the dialog between Rick, Cliff and the Hippie group. The language used by Rick Dalton strongly reflects how his social position is, which is a rising middle to upper class actor. Cliff is a stunt double, whose social position is much lower than Rick, the boss who hired him. Meanwhile, the hippie group uses free, unstructured language as their form of expression.

In the language spoken by Rick Dalton, it can be categorized into the

elaboration code, where this code describes how the speaker uses language directly with long, structured, and clear sentences. As for Cliff Booth, the language he speaks can be categorized into a restricted code. Cliff is a stunt double, Cliff speaks simpler, shorter and as it is. The language spoken by Rick to the hippie group is very different and sees the hippie group as a lowly social group.

Overall, the analysis in Once Upon a Time in Hollywood is done to prove that language is not only a means of communication, but also as a social identity, language style, and also to show power for the speaker. Language can also influence social interaction in society. As well as how the use of language and its relation to social identity in 1960 in the Hollywood film industry.

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