

Stereotype: A Sociolinguistic Study on Freedom Writers Movie

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Abstract

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This paper is about a sociolinguistics study of stereotypes reflected in Freedom Writers movie. The objectives of this paper is to describe the categories of stereotypes. This paper will be used descriptive qualitative method to describe the phenomenon that was happened in Freedom writers movie. The data is collected from transcript of text and dialogue from the movie. For the data analysis it will classify and interpret based on theories of sociolinguistics study. The sociolinguistics problem of stereotypes that is found from the movie are gender, race and occupation. In the movie race is the highest frequency since the character of the movie come from multicultural communities. Therefore, it is easier to identify the racist problem in the movie since there are data found.

1. Introduction

In a multicultural country usually people comes from different norm, race and also language. Sometimes The difference in cultures creates a possibility in understanding others' intention. Even though they may speak with same language but in different culture, people probably accept it in different perspective. There is a common example in multicultural communities such as In the United States. In the US, there are preconceptions who belief that Black people are associated with crime and aggressiveness. While such perception is not completely true, some people still believe it and view Black people as criminals. This particular perception is known as stereotype.

Generally, stereotypes are perceived in a bad way because they suggest negative

preconceptions. Nevertheless, there are also stereotypes which suggest positive preconceptions. For example, people stereotype Asians tend to be nerdy and American tend to have big self-confidence. In the real world not all Asians are nerdy and not All Americans have self-confidence. The phenomenon of stereotyping can be found not only in society but also in a movie. The movie of "freedom writers" are a good example of real life settings which show the occurrences of various stereotypes.

The movie tells about Erin Gruwell, a first time teacher, who wants to encourage the students in her English class to learn about

tolerance and to pursue education beyond high school. It uses Freedom Writers movie as the object and focuses on the stereotypes occurring in the movie. The movie is chosen as the object because it represents the life in a multicultural society and shows numerous stereotypes from the characters.

There is various problem of stereotyping. The first is various culture discover many variations on beliefs, norms, religions, values. From the difference it may create conflict especially for superior and inferior group. Conflict of superior and inferior group may lead to discrimination and even hatred between the cultures or groups. The second individuals are stereotype other groups, there must be some motives behind the action which prompt the use of stereotypes. The term stereotype was introduced by Walter Lippmann in 1922 to describe typical picture which comes to mind about a certain social group [1]. The word refers to characteristics which are believed belong to a group.

Some characteristics are perceived to be part of some social groups. Brown and Turner [2] explains that stereotypes are formed from the perception of differences between groups. Each of the groups has something that determinate them from other groups. The differences generate and become the base of stereotypes. Stereotypes are classified into several categories. According to Schneider [3], those categories can be listed as gender, race, age, physical features, language, occupations and socioeconomic status, national groups, and so on.

Race is one of the categories which become the basis of stereotypes. According to Nelson [4] race is a category of people who share certain hereditary physical traits, such as skin colors, facial features, and heights. He even regards skin color and facial features as major indications to identify race. Other cues that also differentiate one race from another are names, vocal qualities, and accent.

Stereotypes also occur because of people's various socioeconomic status. Prestige and financial rewards of work determine this status. People of higher status are often seen as more intelligent and selfish, whereas middle-class people consider themselves thrifty and less lazy than the poor ones. According to Johannesen-Schmidt and

Eagly in Schneider [3], positive qualities generally increase and communal qualities decrease slightly with income levels.

In short, stereotypes are expectations and beliefs that is made by group of people based on others group or individual characteristic. The image that people made to other group is not always true. It is only perception. Thus, it is not always accurate

The focus on this paper is investigating stereotypes in Freedom writers movie and also broken down into a question that is What are categories of stereotypes that is existed in the Freedom Writer movie? from the question, this paper aims at examine types of stereotype that is happened in a movie. It is also aim in linking phenomenons with theoretical framework. Thus the reader will get insight and knowledge about types of stereotype in society.

2. METHOD

This paper will be used qualitative approach with description in it. The object of the study is society reflected in the movie. Types of data is taken from primary and secondary data. The primary data is focusing on text in the movie. The secondary data is taken from the support analysis. The technique of data collection is done by watching the movie first and then short the text from the movie that is related to stereotypes. The technique of data analysis is carried out by applying sociolinguistics theory.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Findings

Categories of stereotypes

Stereotypes are classified into several categories. According to Schneider [3], those categories can be listed as gender, race, age, physical features, language, occupations and socioeconomic status, national groups, and other miscellaneous categories. In this term Zachery will discuss 3 main stereotypes that were found. They are Gender, Race and occupations status.

1. Gender

Gender is one of the social categories commonly used as the basis of stereotypes.

Freedom Writers focuses on teachers and high school students with various cultural backgrounds. Instead, this category is found outside the school as the two gender stereotypes uttered in the movie occur in family settings.



Figure 1 : Erin and Scott are having conversations about Scott intention to divorce.

The following is their expression of their conversation

- Scott : Then what do you need me for?
 Erin : You're my husband. Why can't you stand by me and be part of it, the way wives support husbands?
 Scott : **Because I can't be your wife. I wish I could make that sound less awful.**

Scott is feeling unhappy with their marriage because Erin keeps paying extra attention to her students. Erin wants to know why Scott cannot support her the way wives support their husbands. Scott's simple response to Erin's question is that he cannot be her wife. In his statement, he is trying to say that the reason he cannot be her wife is because he is not a woman. He can't teach Erin as well as Erin teaches her students in class. Scott chooses to use a gender stereotype of woman and the word wife to convey his point that he will never support Erin in her endeavors to teach her students because he is a man.

2. Race

Since Freedom Writers focuses on Erin and her multicultural students, the use of race as a basis of stereotypes can be found frequently. Erin and her students, who do not know each other very well, often make early

assumptions about each other even when they do not have proof to support their opinions.



Figure 2 : Jamal (Black student) mocked other student.

Here is the first example of the data findings of racial stereotypes occurred in the movie. The following dialogue happens in Erin's class.

- Erin : We're gonna be covering Tupac Shuakur.
 Student : It's Twopac
 Erin : TwoPac. Excuse me. Raise your hand! Really I thought there will be more fans? I have the lyric of the song printed out. I want you to write the phrase I've written on the board it's an example of internal rhyme. What he does is really sophisticated and cool actually
 Students: (rapping)
 Eva : have you be a teacher before?
 (students are making nuisance)
 Erin : All right, you know what? I want you all to move to this side of the room. You in the back, up here. Sindy and all of you, move to the back. Come on. Let's go. Now!
 Jamal` : **Get your ass back to China, all of y'all.**
 A Cambodian student : You're all little midget-ass punks. Move before I stomp your peanuts.

The dialogue above takes place During Erin's English class. Her students are creating nuisance so Erin decides to change their seating arrangements. When they move seats, a black student named Jamal passes a group of Cambodian students and says that they should

go back to China. There is a stereotype based on race in Jamal's utterance. His racist remark suggests that Asian people are all from China. He generalizes Asians and thinks they consist of one race only with how he orders the Cambodian students to go back to China. Furthermore, he uses words like **all**, y'all and China which emphasize his stereotype towards the Cambodian students. Chinese is well known as Asians. Aside from being incorrect, this stereotype can also be offensive.

The next example of race used as a category of stereotypes is presented in the following conversation. Erin finds out that her students are making fun of Jamal. One of the students are drawing Jamal's face with a big lips and a big nose and let all students to see his picture in a paper. Erin scolds the class but her students do not think she has any right to tell them what to do.

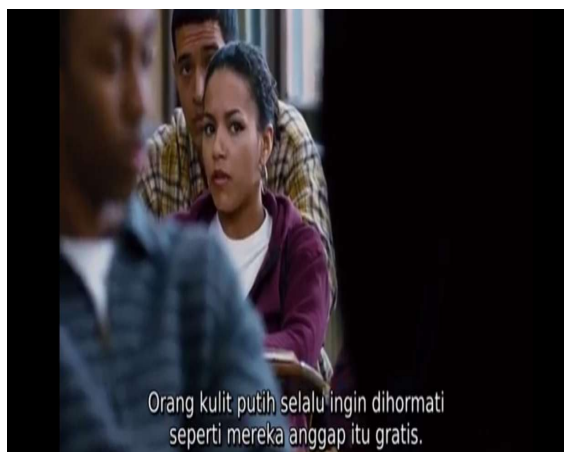


Figure 3 : When Eva are having negative perception about Erin's Intention

Here is the second example of the findings of racial stereotypes occurred in the movie. The following dialogue happens in during class

Andre : Why should I give my respect to you? 'Cause you're a teacher? I don't know you. How do I know you're not a liar standing up there? How do I know you're not a bad person standing up there? I'm not just gonna give you my respect because you're called a teacher.

Eva : **White people always wanting their respect like they deserve it for free.**

Erin : I'm a teacher. It doesn't matter what color I am.

The argument between Erin and her students gets even more heated as Eva, a Latino student, starts bringing up Erin's race to reveal her dislike towards white people. Eva points out that white people always want to get what they want as if everything is free. Eva expresses her racial stereotype of white people. She ignores Erin's characteristics as an individual and believes that Erin is not any different from other white people. The stereotype performed by Eva is reinforced by her use of the plural noun people and the word white.

The next example is about Eva's insight about white people. Eva keep on stereotyping a white people because she has a bad experience in her life. That's why Eva always thinks that white people is bad.



Figure 4: Eva keeps on having bad perspective about white people

This is the following conversation between Eva and Erin

Erin : You hate me?

Eva : Yeah

Erin : You don't know me

Eva : **I know what you can do.** I saw white police shot my friend from the back to reach him. I saw police come over my house and take my father for no reasons because they feel like this. Except because they can. And they can because they're white. So I hate white people outside

The other example is about white people stereotyping Erin's student that they can't do anything

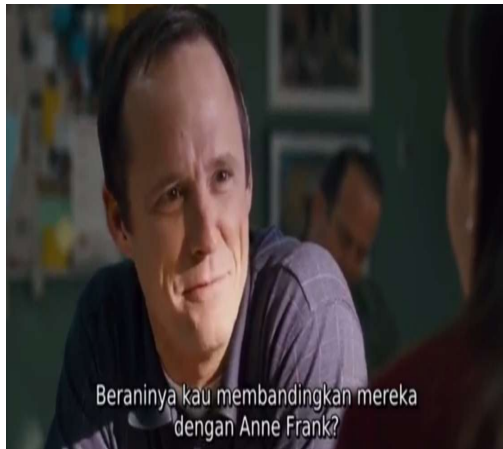


Figure 5 : other white teacher are having conversation with Erin gruwell

Erin : Since you know Margarent better than I do, I just want to do back up from you. I'm thinking about diary "Diary of Anne frank" and they will be great for them. They can relate their stories considering all problem they face

Other teacher : Off course it's a universal stories. I mean Anne Frank, Rodney King. They're almost unchangeable.

Erin : Are you making fun of me?

Other teacher : Yeah. Oh God listen what are you saying? **How dare you compare them to Anne Frank.** They hide and around with automatic weapons. I'm the one living at fear. I can't wake up from door at night

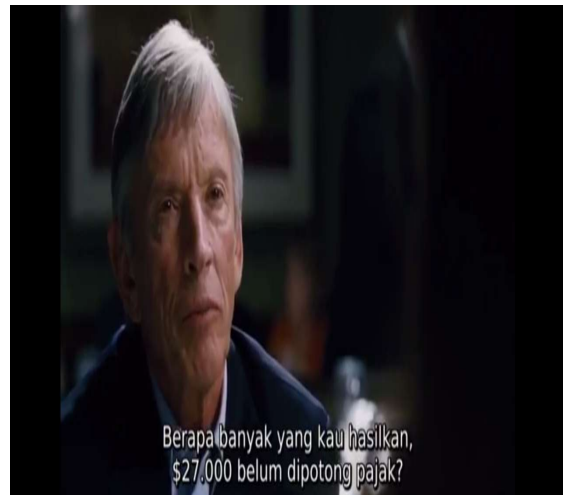
Erin : and you blame this kids?

Other teacher : this school is accredited A school before they come here. **Look at what they've change.**

Other teacher think that Erin Gruwell's student are always having bad attitude. The other teacher use utterance "How dare you compare them to Anne Frank" the think that her students can't be a hero such as Anne frank because all of her students are beast. However, Erin is denying the other teacher opinion about her kids and she believed that her students can be changed one day.

3. Occupational and socioeconomic status

Stereotypes based on occupational status are commonly found in society. As the movie focuses more on Erin, her students, and their relationships, the occupations status of the characters are not given that much emphasis. In addition, there are only two occupations which get exposure throughout the movie: teacher and architect.



Below is a dialogue that displays a stereotype of teacher.

Steve : So, how's work?

Erin : Dad.

Steve : I was asking your husband.

Scott : It's good. I mean, for now. It's a good company. I pretty much run the computer data department.

Steve : I thought you were an architect.

Erin : He is. He's just taking a break.

Scott : And the money's good for now.

Steve : **How much are you making, \$27,000 before taxes? 51**

Erin : If you know, why are you asking?

Scott : So, what's everybody gonna eat?

At a family dinner, Erin's father, Steve, asks her and her husband about their jobs. When her father addresses the topic about her salary as a teacher to her, he wants to say that he thinks the amount of her salary is not good enough for her. His question contains a stereotype that teacher as an occupation does not make much money. Erin's answer for him

shows that she is not pleased with what her father tries to suggest.

3.2 Discussion

In the movie *Gruwel* is one from many teachers who can break a racist and a stereotype problem in her class. She can make students realize that whatever their color, they are same actually. Before *Gruwell* comes to class there are a lot of racist problem such as students only interact with same ethnicity, black people hates white people, and they also regard that white people is superior and black people is inferior. At the first time, when *Gruwell* comes to their class they also hate their teacher because she is white. However finally *Gruwell* can break racist and stereotypes issue in her classroom.

In the movie, it shows that black people always regard that white people is superior than them. When *Gruwell* at first come to their class, most of the students were not give their respect to the teacher because the teacher color is white. It is in line with the definition of stereotype from Resinger [5]. He defines stereotype is when people meet a new people in their group, they overgeneralized and disregard individual variation within their group. According to Schneider [3] this is type of stereotyping on race.

After the students know about the real characteristic from *Gruwell* they become love to the teacher. It is the prove that stereotype is not always right [5]. At first the students underestimate the teacher but finally in the last semester they realize that *Gruwell* is the best teacher they've ever have.

They are other type of stereotypes according to Schneider [3] With different gender, it can also create stereotype. The example is when *Gruwell* talks with her husband. The husband divorce *Gruwell* because she is more focus on her students rather than him. He said that he cannot be woman like *Gruwell* that understand people more.

The other stereotype that is found in the movie is occupational status. The example of occupational status is when *Gruwell's* father is regard that her salary is not good enough, even though *Gruwell* can accept her salary

and she like her job a lot. There is possibilities if he father have higher salary than *gruwell*. This is in line with Nelson's study in 2002. She states that prestige and financial rewards of work determines status. And people who have higher status often seen as more intelligent and selfish.

4. CONCLUSION

To sum up about the findings, there are 3 categories used as the bases of the stereotypes that occur in *Freedom Writers* movie. They are gender, race, and occupational and socioeconomic status. There are a lot of stereotypes that is found in race since the story is taken place in multicultural communities. There are a lot of conflict regarding the color of skin. Cultural dimension was brought in the stereotype. According to the movie a teacher named *Erin Gruwell* can break students stereotype. Before she came into the class consist of problematic students, their life is messy. After she comes in her student's life. The student can change their attitude. It is also break a stereotype that the beast will not always bad. Because of someone the beast can be heroes.

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