

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Movie, also known as film, is a tool of visual communication, which is a set of recording of moving images to tell stories and teach people something (Champoux 2007, 6). It is often used to convey emotions, entertain, raise awareness about an issue, entertain the viewer, etc. A film was created to spread a message concerning tastes, speech, customs of a certain population to distant areas across the country. It creates a homogenized culture by pushing away the regional differences.

According to Taeuber and Taeuber, as cited in Hirschman and Mogford (2009), in 1990, immigration and industrialization were correlated in American history. Mainly the poor population, especially Blacks from the South, began migrating to Northern cities in large numbers for working as slaves. On the other side, the managerial elite class were almost exclusively white during the era of industrialization(Hirschman and Mogford 2009, 899).

Slavery and cotton had become essential to America's economic growth. Nevertheless, slavery was the most violent and contentious event in American history. Abolitionism was an organized movement to end the practice of slavery in the United States. Most early abolitionists were white, religious Americans, but some of the leaders of the movement were also black men who had escaped from

bondage (Gillon 2019). Thus, abolitionists movie is often popular and successfully gained interest from the public.

The increasing number of African Americans in the United States nowadays leads to the importance of their present roles in movies. This phenomenon has made movie makers to make sure on how correctly the language of its characters is illustrated. The choice of topic is based on an interesting phenomenon about one of English varieties in American societies called African-American Vernacular English (AAVE). AAVE dialect has unique characteristics that can be easily noticed as it is found in various media nowadays. AAVE with its unique characteristics exerts great influence on the style and the profound meaning of the movie and the development of America's multi-cultural society.

The former presence of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) is related to the history of slavery in the United States. It was a language spoken by African Slaves in the 1960s (Mufwene 2015, 58). It was born in the Southern parts of the United States. Hence, it had shared many features with Southern American English (Bailey and Thomas 1998). The former occurred when Africans did not want to move to North-America and became slaves as there was colonization by Britain, Irish, German, Italian, Dutch. Africans tried to absorb their languages in order to communicate with them. Thus, because of historical situations, this English variation became a natural consequence of language development, which is known as African American Vernacular English (AAVE).

In sociolinguistics, according to Green (2002), AAVE is defined as a social dialect of American English that has its own characteristics, such as a set of phonological, grammatical, semantical and lexical that make it different from Standard English. The grammatical features of AAVE include the morphological and syntactical patterns. These linguistic differences are the symbol of ethnicity, which indicates the value of cultural distinctiveness of African Americans.

AAVE shows the distinctive features from Standard English, for instance, in term of phonological patterns, there is a restriction on a combination of consonant sounds, especially at the end of words, such as *des* (desk), *hand* (han), *tes* (test)(Green 2002, 107). Moreover, Lisa Green gave an example of AAVE speaker's sentence, as cited in *Language in the USA: Themes for the Twenty-First Century*(2014), which is "*Didn't nobody ask me do I be late for class.*" There are three AAVE features from the sentence, which are inversion / multiple negation, embedded 'yes' or 'no' question, and habitual *be*. Moreover, lexical features of AAVE refer to certain words and phrases that have a unique meaning in AAVE, for example, *get my praise on* means 'to praise or worship'.

Many linguists believe one of the factors of the use of AAVE features is influenced by socio-economic class (Green 2002, 107). Rickford (1999, 10) found how those distinctive features were used according to socio-economic class. It is found the underclass speakers used AAVE grammatical features 50% to 70% time, whereas middle-class speakers used them only 10% of the time or less. The grammatical features of AAVE like copula absence, multiple negations, and the

absence of present tense *-s* were sharply stratified. Hence, it can be seen as the evidence that there is class stratification of using AAVE in the United States.

In addition, AAVE is a kind of English dialect like any other (Baugh 2000). However, it goes through extreme stigma due to the history of slavery in America. It results in bad prejudice of this dialect and tends to be seen as Broken English. While actually, it has its coherent and rule-bound grammar.

The writer chose the movie entitled *Harriet* for this study. *Harriet* is a historical movie of an American abolitionist and political activist named Harriet Tubman which directed by Kasi Lemmons, produced by Debra Martin Chase, Daniela Taplin Lundberg, Gregory Allen Howard, and distributed by Focus Features. The writer chose this movie due to the fact that the movie was grossed better than the original expectation. As McClintock (2019) reported through The Hollywood Reporter-web, the movie was grossed \$3.9 million on its first day. It shone in its nationwide debut over the weekend for \$12 million from 2,059 theaters. *Harriet* is also known as a unique film about American slavery. Unlike the previous movies that set in antebellum period with black bondsmen ("The Birth of a Nation" in 2016, "12 Years a Slave" in 2013, "Django Unchained" in 2012) and focus on white people's perspective ("The Free State of Jones" in 2016), *Harriet* represents a brave black woman committed to freedom and became a hero of anti-slavery movement (Woolfork 2019).

Also, the movie won many awards, such as AARP Movies for Grownups Awards in 2020, African-American Film Critics Association in 2019, Black Film

Critics Circle Awards in 2019, Hollywood Film Awards in 2019, etc. The characters of the movie are roled by two ethics, which are White-Americans and African-Americans. The writer chose the movie because white people and black people interacted with each other. It is found that not only black people used AAVE, but white people also used this dialect in their utterances. Thus, the writer chose this movie because AAVE was constantly used by the characters as it fulfills the requirement for the characteristics of AAVE.

Harriet is based on the true story of Harriet Tubman, also known as Minty, who was an African-American slave owned by a mean-spirited master, named Gideon. In the movie, Harriet was turned to be an anti-slavery activist in the 1800s. The story is about the struggle of a slave sought for freedom in Dorchester County, Maryland. Once she got her freedom, she dedicated her life to black slaves by helping them to escape from their masters and heading to Philadelphia.

In the movie, masters of the slave are roled by White-American characters, whereas slaves are roled by African-American characters, which lead to affect the language variation of its speaker. The writer analyzed the utterances of Harriet and Gideon because they played an active role in the movie. Gideon was the main antagonist of the movie, who owned plantation and slaves and considered as having a higher social class in a small village such as Maryland. On the other hand, Harriet was the main character who was one of Gideon's favorite slaves who tried to reach out for her freedom. The writer found there are obvious differences in the use of AAVE features by its speaker in the movie. The

differences are located in the area of syntactic, morphology, and phonology constructions.

In the form of syntactical patterns, Harriet tends to omit the copula in her sentence, as in “*He the devil.*” Gideon tends to omit copula in his question, such as “*You know Bigger Long?*”. Moreover, the writer found the morphological patterns of AAVE in their utterances. Harriet and Gideon use different AAVE features to construct a sentence past tense form. There was an event when Gideon used the participle form as past, such as “*You seen her*”, whereas Harriet used the base root of verb as past, as in “*He say he taking me.*” In terms of phonological features, Gideon mostly alternated *-ing* sound into *-in* as in “*Caught him sniffin’ /’snɪfɪn/ around the cabins*”, whereas Harriet changed the initial /th/ as /d/ or /t/ in her utterances, for instance, “*They /dæy/gonna sell me South, away from my husband and my family.*”

Thus, because of those differences in the use of AAVE features in the movie, the writer intrigues to compare the use of AAVE features between Harriet and Gideon through their utterances. The writer uses Lisa Green’s theory (2002) in order to find out the AAVE grammar, which includes grammatical and phonological features of Harriet and Gideon’s utterances in the movie. Green (2002) stated that some of AAVE features are the absence of relative pronoun, preterite had, existential *it* and *dey*, and irregular verbs. Besides, the writer conducts this study due to the fact that there are not many studies that have been discussed about grammatical features and phonological of AAVE, especially using a movie as the object. Hence, this dialect can be explained thoroughly.

Previous studies have found the use of this language variety in movies. There was one previous study that was similar to this study; Putri (2015) analyzed both grammatical and phonological features of AAVE that are used by two maids characters in *the Help* movie. Halimah (2018) analyzed the use of AAVE features by white characters in *12 Years A Slave* movie. Meanwhile, there was also studies of AAVE features in song lyrics. Putri (2019) conducted research of both grammatical and phonological features that are used by Non-Black Rapper in the song lyrics of Rich Brian. On the other hand, Basandi (2015) focused on the grammatical features of AAVE that are used by African-Americans in Richard Wright's short story. However, none of these studies have compared the AAVE features that are used by White-American and African-American characters in a movie. Therefore, the main objective of this thesis is to compare the difference of AAVE features that are used by White-American master and African-American slave in the *Harriet* movie.

1.2 Statements of the Problem

Based on the background of the study, the writer formulates the problems as follows:

1. What are the AAVE features used by Harriet and Gideon in the movie?
2. How are AAVE features used differently by Harriet and Gideon in the movie?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Based on the problem formulation, the objectives of the study are listed as follows:

1. To identify the AAVE features used by Harriet and Gideon in the movie.
2. To explain the usage differences of AAVE features by Harriet and Gideon in the movie.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is expected to give theoretical and practical benefits. Theoretically, this study can be useful as a valuable reference for the lecturers, students, readers, and all academic participants regarding the discussion within sociolinguistics scope about varieties of English, especially African-American Vernacular English (AAVE).

The findings of the study hopefully can enhance and provide further knowledge of the grammatical and phonological features of AAVE. It is hoped that it can increase the readers' awareness in the movie character's utterances which contain distinctive linguistic features of vernacular language. Thus, the study of English dialect that is affected by social factors can be explained thoroughly. In addition, by describing the preference of African-American and White-American use certain AAVE features in their utterances, hopefully, it can provide an example of the relationship between language and society as well. Then, practically, it is expected that the study could be used by the moviemaker as a reference to illustrate the language variety in their movie.

1.5 Scope and Limitation

The writer only focuses on identifying the AAVE dialect patterns in terms of grammatical and phonological patterns in the movie. Moreover, there are many theories that determine AAVE features. However, the writer only uses the theory of Lisa Green to find out the grammatical features, consist of the syntactical and morphological patterns, and the phonological features of AAVE in the movie.

In *Harriet* movie, there are a number of African-American and White-American castings. Yet, this study only focuses on two characters, Harriet and Gideon, to find out their linguistic features of AAVE and describe the different ways in which selected AAVE features are used by African-American and White-American characters in the movie. Furthermore, this study only focuses on observing the differences in the use of certain features of AAVE.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

1. African American Vernacular English: A variation of American English spoken by African-Americans in a certain community which has its own characteristics differs from Standard American English (Yule 2010).
2. *Harriet* movie is a biographical film about African-American activist named Harriet Tubman which is released in 2019.
3. Grammatical features: The grammatical features of AAVE cover the syntactical and morphological patterns, which have identifiable features, such as remote *been*, zero copula, multiple negators, etc. (Green 2002).
4. Phonological features: Features that consist of sound systems of AAVE, which are vowels, diphthongs, and syllable (Green 2002).