Socio-Pragmatic Functions of Racial Discrimination in Oscar's Movie: Get Out

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Abstract

This paper aims to analyze the racial discrimination in the movie linguistically. More particularly, it investigates the socio-pragmatic functions that are utilised in the movie to realise racial discrimination which in this case is directed against the Blacks in America. The analysis is conducted with reference of discriminatory Socio-pragmatic functions model that presented by Graumann and Wintermantel (1989) to deal with the linguistic patterns of racial discrimination in informal interpersonal interactions. The results show that the dominant social functions of racial discrimination in *Get Out* movie is the separation and fixation while the discriminatory evaluation does not appear in the analysed data. The results also display that the characters in *Get Out* movie express their racial discriminations mainly in direct and explicit ways.

Key words: Socio-pragmatic functions, racial discrimination, Oscar movie, and Get Out.

Introduction

It would be remiss not to mention racial discrimination as one of the most significant issues that has irrevocably altered and negatively impacted the way in which the American people deal with difference of any kind when discussing societal inequalities. In such environment, racial background remains to have an impact on people's lives. In spite of the fact that all individuals are given equal rights by law, this is not always the case. In everyday interactions, bias and stereotyping emerge and have a deleterious effect on the perspectives of many people (Hacker, 2010).

To discriminate is to differentiate in treatment based on a categorical criterion, typically without regard to specific attributes or qualities of the individual being discriminated. Differential treatment based on (real or perceived) membership in a group or class is referred to as "categorical discrimination" in the field of social psychology. Social discrimination is the denial of equal treatment amounts to the denial of equal rights, and thus, that this form of discrimination violates basic principles of justice and equality. Certain groups of people are distinguished in terms of access to public services, such as jobs, salaries, and or of the use of public facilities (Graumann and Wintermantel, 1989: 183).

However, this practise is condemned through different forms of rejection in the American society. One of these forms is the literature in general and movies in particular. The film Get Out is exemplary of this type. When viewed with a critical eye, this horror film sheds light on the challenges black Americans face in the present day and the strategies they employ to survive in a predominantly white country (Pinedo, 2020). It has received a great attention in the recent time and won many Awards from organizations that are concerned with movies evaluation such as Oscar Academy and American Film Institute among many others for they way it deals with a sensitive topic like racial discrimination. So, this study aims at finding answers to the following questions:

1- What types of socio-pragmatic functions are utilised in the movie to linguistically realise racial discrimination?
2- How do such socio-pragmatic functions of discrimination contribute to the general theme of the movie?

The Concept of Racial Discrimination

To discriminate is to oppress, treat unjustly, or be unfair to another person or group of people, typically through one's actions or inactions. Discrimination frequently occurs when there is negative connotation or bias attached to an individual or group of people. Stigma is the result of discriminatory thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors directed at an individual or a group of people (Johnson, 2013: 201). Racial discrimination can be defined as any discrimination against any individual on the basis of their skin color, or racial or ethnic origin (Dayal, 2018: 249).

Discrimination on the basis of skin color is somehow attempt to racial discrimination because of the prevalence with which skin color serves as a replacement for race in everyday interactions and as a factor in legal systems that apply stringent criteria. A harmful effect of discrimination is the negative treatment of people of lower-status races (Assidiqi and Nurhadi 2019: 51). According to Mayuuf, & So'ad (2020), discrimination can be found in various situations of everyday life. They (ibid.) added that a person engages in discrimination if they treat another person who is recognised as being of a certain class in a different manner than they otherwise would have done as a result of an inappropriate disposition or prejudice towards people who are members of that class.

Various studies deal with discrimination from a linguistic perspective. For example, Graumann and Wintermantel (1989: 184-86) identified five socio-pragmatic functions for social discrimination. These functions were based on the cognitive and affective processes that occurred within the environment, as well as the language realisation of such functions. To begin, discrimination can serve as a technique for segregating individuals. In particular, the discriminator distinguishes discriminated groups by employing "we" and "them" pronouns or categorizing the semantically. The second function of discrimination is distancing the discriminated people away of the discriminators. This function is usually achieved by dichotomising the differences with the use of non-immediate and spatio-temporal distancing pronouns. Thirdly, discrimination can serve as a clarifying tool through exaggerating the differences in empathic speech and polarizing the contract with the discriminated people.

Fourth, those who are marginalised and emphasised for their differences are often subjected to devaluing, "denigrating" as a technique of marginalisation. It is possible to achieve the negative connotation of such discriminating phrases by offering a categorical negative rating through the use of words such as "Nigger" and "Wop" or triggering affective and negative responses to particular social category. Finally, people, often, are identified not as individual persons , but as instances of a category or as typical members of an outgroup. This may be done in two ways: either by identifying a type that best fits the dsicrminated individual, or by assigning him (typical) characteristics.

Graumann and Wintermantel (1989: 199) distinguish between direct and indirect discrimination by dealing with the concrete speech situation in which discrimination is enacted through words. When the target of discrimination is also a participant in the conversation between the act of discrimination originates, this is known as "direct discrimination." When someone is not physically present is being targeted by the d-speech act; this constitutes an in-group form of "talk about others."

Graumann and Wintermantel (ibid.) also differentiate between overt and covert forms of d-speak . This type of d-speech is characterized by an overtly racist or sexist undertone, with the underlying proposition attributing a negative predicate to a person's membership in a social group or to an outgroup in general. That is to say, in cases of overt verbal discrimination, the utterance detached from its context typically serves as a unique identifier for the discriminatory function. However, the discriminatory function of implicit d-speech requires knowledge of the circumstances, presuppositions, and implications of the utterance in order to be caught.

The Plot of Get Out Movie

it is a 2017 American Horror movie that is written and directed by Jordan Peele. It critiques racism that is prevailed in the American society (Harris, 2017). The plot of the movie follows Chris who is a young African American man who visits the family of his girlfriend Rose who are White. As the weekend with her family progresses, Chris uncovers several dark secrets from Rose's family and friends. As he tries to

leave the house, he is stopped by Rose and her family. Rose's hypnotherapist mother knocks him out with her hypnosis, but he managed to escape at the end. It is later revealed that her family transplants their brains into other people's bodies granting them preferred physical characteristics and a twisted form of immortality.

The National Board of Review, the American Film Institute, and Time all ranked it as one of the best ten movies of the year, and they all agreed that it was an excellent choice. At the 90th Academy Awards, it was awarded the Oscar for Best Original Screenplay, and it also received nominations for Best Picture, Best Director, and Best Actor. In addition to that, it was nominated for other prizes at Critics' Choice Awards, Golden Globe Awards, and British Academy Film Awards. The movie has maintained a solid reputation ever since it was first made available to the public, and it is frequently mentioned by reviewers as one of the finest films of the 21st century. Furthermore, it has been featured in several selections of the best films of the 2010s. In 2021, it is ranked by the Writer's Guild of America the greatest screenplay of the 21st century (Gooding, 2020).

Previous studies

The movie received some attention from the researchers around the world. The two studies are conducted to invegiate the criticism aspects in the movie. The first study is by Nurhadi and Assidiqi (2019) who study racism and stereotypes patterns in the movie. They find that racism in the movie is constructed by three elements: dialog, characterization and plot. Moreover, they discover that the stereotypes of racism that are raised in the movie are discrimination, prejudice and violence. The second study is by Deswanto (2022) who concentrates on describing the racial discrimination found in the movie basing on social criticism theories. He concludes that the racial discrimination in the movie is portrayed as a scary act which is practised by individuals and groups. However, this study aims to investigate the way and types of the socio-pragmatic functions that are utilised in the movie to linguistically realise the racial discrimination.

Methodology

To achieve the aims of this study, the movie has viewed and its original script referred (see Appendix). Then, the researcher shows the ways and types of the socio-pragmatic functions that are utilised in the movie to linguistically realise racial discrimination qualitatively and quantitatively. The excerpts that contain racial discrimination are extracted from the movie script. The utterances in each excerpt are marked alphabetically (a-z). The analysis is conducted with reference to model of discriminatory socio-pragmatic functions that is presented by Graumann and Wintermantel (1989) to deal with the linguistic patterns of racial discrimination in informal interpersonal interactions. They (ibid.) classified the socio-pragmatic functions of discrimination into five types: separating, distancing, accentuating, evaluating, and fixating. Furthermore, each of these functions can be direct/ indirect and explicit/ implicit.

Data Analysis

Excerpt 1:
"(a) Mom, Dad, my **black** friend and I are coming
up for the weekend? (b) He's **African** American,
(c) but I hope you
can **overlook** that".

In this excerpt, there are three *indirect* discriminations as Rose talks to her parents about Chris. The first two are realised in (a) and (b) when she describes him as *black* and *African* American. They take the *explicit* form as the labelled words can be identified as discriminatory. The third one which is realised in (c) takes the implicit form as it will lose its discriminatory nature outside this context of situation. The socio-pragmatic functions of these types of discrimination are to *separate* Chis by categorizing him cognitively and emotionally as back and African American. Rose's request to her parents to overlook this categorization presupposes that her community in general and her family in particular admit this kind of discriminatory categorization.

Excerpt 2:

"(a)The United **Negro** College Fund. (b)A
mind is a terrible thing to waste".

This excerpt which is a TV. advertisement declares a special scholarship to black people contains two types of direct discrimination. The first one is realised in (a) by using the term ***"negro"*** that refers to the blacks. Although the idea is to help and enable them to continue their education, but the discrimination is clear in the way to refer to them. This is an explicit discrimination as the word ***"negro"*** still indicates the discrimination out of this context. This would convey a notion of a fundamental lack existed in them especially this declaration is followed by the second type of discrimination in (b) in the statement "*A mind is a terrible thing to waste*", assuming that black people are not highly intelligent to use their mind. Furthermore, this type of discrimination is an implicit one as taking this statement out of this context would not convey a discrimination.

However, both these two types of discrimination are direct as they are directed to the black people to join the college and use their minds rather than the other way around??. The social function of the first discrimination is to separating them through the word *"Negro"* while the function of the second type is fixating and labelling categorical attribution of negative characteristics to the Blacks.

Excerpt 3:

"Dean:(a) you can call me mr. Armitage.
Chris: (b)Of course. I"—

In this excerpt, Rose's father asked Chris to call him Mr. Armitage in their first meeting. This indicates a direct discrimination as Dean refers to himself as master to implicate his social identity as a white person who has an unequal status with Chris. It is implicit because it would not mean a discrimination if it said outside this context of situation. The social function of this differentiating is to separating Chris as non-white.

Excerpt 4:

"Dean: (a)There's Hitler on his high
horse with his perfect Aryan race,
and here comes this black fella to
prove him wrong in front of the
world".

In this excerpt, Rose's father (Dean) talks about the history of his family by describing his father as the perfect example of the Aryan race who was defeated by a black person. He expresses his disappointment by the result. He means the Aaryan race should not be defeated by the Black. This is indirect discrimination as he refers to someone who was absent at the moment of speaking. However, it is an explicit discrimination as the racist terms "Aaryan race" and "black" could indicate the same image of discrimination and racism whether they are mentioned in this context or another. In terms of the socio-pragmatic functions, this is an accentuating discrimination as it exaggerates the differences between the two races.

Excerpt 5:

"Dean: (a)We hired them a few years ago
to help care for my parents"

In this excerpt, he again expresses his indirect discrimination when he talks about the black servants whom he has at his house. He explains to Chris that his family had hired them to help his parents. This is explicit discrimination that the blacks are for rent or sell to help the whites. Moreover, the social function of this discrimination is distancing as Dean focuses on using the personal pronouns "*we*" and *"them"* to refer to whites and blacks, respectively. In that, he implies non-immediate distance between the two.

Excerpt 6:

"Jeremy: (a)Cause, with your frame, your
genetic make-up? (b)If you pushed
your body, I mean really trained,
you'd be a beast".

In this excerpt, Rose's brother (Jeremy) expresses a direct discrimination to Chris when he talks about Chis's genetic make-up as black that could make him a beast. This is an implicit discrimination as he refers to a genetic ability that might make a particular person advantageous, but he labels this attribute to the blacks. However, it is a fixating discrimination by labelling generic categorization by such properties.

Excerpt 7:
"Parker: (a)It's not like one's better than the other.
(b)When you look at the big picture,
you'll see its always shifting. (c)The
question of "What skin color is
more "culturally advantageous" that
is".

In this excerpt, Parker shows his indirect discriminatory attitudes to stigmatize and denigrate Chris because of his blackness. Chris is shown as an outsider who must find his own way in isolation. However, it is an explicit discrimination as Parker's reformulation of the question to focus on who is more "culturally advantageous" to the society or to the world, implying to Chris that this role is played by the Whites rather than the Blacks. In terms of the social function of discrimination, Parker is fixating these attributes to the White and excluding the Blacks.

Excerpt 8:

"Chris:(a) It's like some
of these people never met a black
dude that doesn't work for them."

In this excerpt, Chris reports to his friend Rod his first day's experience at Rose's family house. Chris states to his friend how the Whites at Rose's house were surprised that he was black and not a servant. This direct and explicit phase of discrimination that Chris has experienced indicates the Whites' view about the Blacks. Such form of discrimination is to show how the Whites are fixating the serving attributes to the Blacks.

Excerpt 9:

"Hiroki: Do you find that being African
American has more advantages or
disadvantages in the modern world?
Chris: Yeah, I don't know, man".

In this excerpt, Dean's friend (Hiroki) displays his indirect discrimination towards Chris by asking him an alternative partiality question of the current status of the African American.. American that was clear in Chris's answer and in his withdrawal from the talk Nevertheless, it is an explicit discrimination because this question triggers the racial discrimination regardless of the context in which it might take place. The social function of this discrimination is separating the Blacks from other people in the American society.

Excerpt 10:

"Roman: (a)You were chosen because of the
physical advantages you've enjoyed
your entire life. (b)I'm certain that
with your natural gifts and our
determination, we'll soon both be a
part of something greater".

In this excerpt, Dean's grandfather (Roman) appears in a recorded video on the screen to Chris while he was confined with a strap to the basement. He shows two direct and explicit types of discrimination to Chris in (a) and (b) by telling him that his family had intentionally targeted him as a research subject. His family conducted a research that fused the minds of elderly whites with the bodies of young black people. People of African descent were enslaved because, despite their tall and powerful postures, they were thought to be mentally incapable of doing the variety of tasks that were required of them. By this, Roman is trying to discriminately fixating such attributes as generic categorizations to the Blacks.

Excerpt 11:

(a) "My family and I are honored to
offer it as a service to members of
our group."

In this excerpt, Roman again shows his direct discrimination of Chris when he states that his experiment to fuse old white minds into strong black bodies is a great service he provides to the Whites. However, this discrimination is implicit as it is difficult to find this statement as discriminatory outside the context of situation. The social function of this discrimination is *separating* and differentiating the Whites as his group rather than the Blacks who will serve the former.

Results and discussion

The results in Table 1 show that the dominant socio-pragmatic function of racial discrimination is the separation with a percentage of 50.00% followed by the fixation with percentage of 35.71%. Distanciation and accentuation are used with an equal percentage of 7.14% while the evaluation does not appear in the analysed data. The prevailed use of separation and fixation in the movie may explain the movie writer's aim to highlight how the racial discrimination is separating the American society through fixating particular attributes to particular group which is the Blacks.

Table 1: The socio-pragmatic functions of racial discrimination

socio-pragmatic functions	Frequency	Percentage
Separation	7	50.00%
Distanciation	1	7.14%
Accentuation	1	7.14%
Evaluation	0	0.00%
Fixation	5	35.71%
total	14	100.00%

Tables 2 below indicates the majority of the racial discrimination in Get Out movie are direct ones with a percentage of 78.57% over the indirect.

Table 2: The types of racial discrimination in terms of directness.

Types of discrimination	Frequency	Percentage
Direct	11	78.57%
Indirect	3	21.43%
Total	14	100.00%

Additionally, in terms of explicitness, Table 3 below shows that the explicit discrimination is more dominant than implicit one with the respective percentages 64.29% and 35.71%. This high utilisation of direct and explicit types of racial discrimination in the movie may reveal the writer's intent to show how the discriminators have not cared about the existence of the discriminated people while they practise such discrimination.

Table 3: The types of racial discrimination in terms of explicitness.

Types of discrimination	Frequency	Percentage
Explicit	9	64.29%
Implicit	5	35.71%
Total	14	100.00%

Conclusion

Through analysing the data basing on the adopted model, it can be concluded that the main characteristic of the racial discrimination in *Get Out* movie is the concentration of using the semantic categorize to separate the Blacks from Whites in America. Linguistically speaking, the writer of the movie supports that by fixating particular attributes to the Blacks to increase the separation. Such attributes are fixated to reflect the American Whites' views towards the American Blacks as slavers and servants.

In terms of directness of the racial discrimination, it is concluded that the Whites never care about the feeling of their Black addresses since most of their discriminatory utterances are directed them directly and explicitly. This may indicate the deep separation and racial discrimination in the American society which are reflected in *Get Out* movie.

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Appendix: Script link

https://www.scriptslug.com/assets/scripts/get-out-2017.pdf

الوظائف التداولية الاجتماعية للتمييز العنصري في فلم الاوسكار: اخرج

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المستخلص

يهدف هذا البحث إلى تحليل التمييز العنصري في الفيلم لغوياً. وعلى وجه التحديد ، فهو يبحث في الوظائف الاجتماعية العملية المستخدمة في الفيلم لتحقيق التمييز العنصري الموجه في هذه الحالة ضد السود في أمريكا. وبالإشارة إلى التحليل الذي تم اجرائه لنمط الوظائف الاجتماعية التمييزية الذي عرضه غرومان وينترمانتل في عام (1989) للتعامل مع هذه الأنماط اللغوية للتمييز العنصري في التفاعلات غير الرسمية بين الافراد. واوضحت النتائج أن الوظائف الاجتماعية السائدة للتمييز العنصري في فيلم Get Out هي الانفصال والتثبيت بينما لا يظهر التقييم التمييزي في البيانات التي تم تحليلها. كما أظهرت النتائج أن الشخصيات في فيلم Get Out تعبر عن تمييزها العنصري بشكل رئيسي و بطرق مباشرة وصريحة.

كلمات مفتاحية : تداولية ، اجتماعية، التمييز عنصري، فلم اوسكار : اخرج