

**THE AFRO-AMERICAN DIALECT USED BY TWO MAIN
CHARACTERS OF BLACK WOMAN IN STOCKETT'S *THE HELP***

THESIS

**Submitted as Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Bachelor
Degree of English Department Faculty of Arts and Humanities**

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DECLARATION

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Declares that this thesis under the title *The Afro-American Dialect Used by Two Main Characters of Black Woman in Stockett's The Help* contains materials which have been conducted as a partial fulfillment of requirements for the Bachelor Degree of English Department Faculty of Arts and Humanities of Sunan Ampel State Islamic University. This thesis contains no material from the previously written by other person except the quotations and theories itself.

Surabaya, July 10th 2018

The Writer



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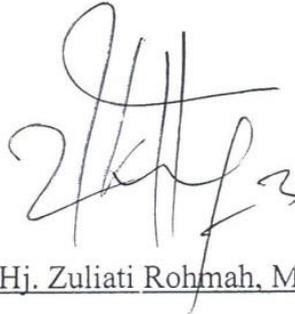
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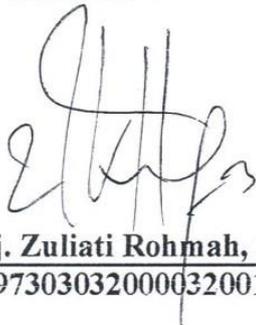
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Social dialect is varieties of language associated with different social groups, status, religion, and ethnicity. Then, personal dialect is the language of individual speaker with its unique characteristics. In this case, the writer limits the analysis which focuses on the social dialect. This study is part of social dialect since the novel that is used in this study presents the using of AAVE dialect by a group of people, a group of Black maids who stay in Jackson Mississippi.

Some researches about dialect have been done by some researchers. First, Edensor (2009) studied dialect in films. His study found that the dialect in South Yorkshire did show some changes but the changes did not affect all features in the same way. His research is only focus on two matters: the first is to describe the dialect found in the films and the second is to describe any changes in grammatical and lexical changes. Second, Rittmayer (2009) also did a study about dialect in film. He presents a series of issues in translation that are particularly important or problematic in the translation of film, including the translation of slangs, dialects, accents, and the use of multiple languages within a single film. He only explains some challenges in the translation of film and the incorporate colloquialisms form across many dialects. The next study was done by Lutfiansyah (2015) and Hasanah (2016) which mainly focused on Southern dialect. They found social types of Southern dialect used by White people in films. Lutfiansyah (2015) added her discussion with the description of the effect of using the dialect while Hasanah added his discussion with the description of the significance of the Southern dialect.

The four previous researches used films or movies as the media in conducting the research. Unlike those researches, this present research uses a novel as the source of data to be analyzed. Indeed, this present research shows how the dialect can be investigated in the text.

A dialect is traditionally reflected in spoken language, not written language. However, there are some examples of literary works showing an attempt to represent a non-standard variety of a language in written literature such as the study which is done by Ningrum, 2014 and Santika (2014). They analyze the novel as their data sources. Ningrum (2014) focused on the discussion about African American English dialect and slang language used by Jim and Huck. She explained the characteristic of AAVE dialect. On the other hand, Santika (2014) focused on Southern dialect. She limited her study on the individual dialect (idiolect) that is used by Rubeus Hagrid, one of the characters in the novel whose dialect is different from other characters. Both of their studies were talking about the characteristics of dialect (including phonology, grammar and vocabulary) and the significance of the dialect.

The studies of Ningrum (2014) and Santika (2014) explained how dialect can be analyzed inside the written text. Moreover, the dialect in the text can represent the social background of the characters. It also helps the readers to understand more about the different characteristics of each character in the text. Therefore, the writer is interested in conducting the same issue but with the different novel. Even though this present research has the same focus on the discussion of African American dialect as in Ningrum (2014), but the writer adds

the explanations with the discussion of cultural elements that are represented in Aibileen and Minny dialogues. In addition, the writer is interested in finding the cultural elements of literary dialect to help her in identifying the significance of the dialect. By looking at the cultural elements; the writer wants to show that the dialect can symbolize the background of the user, where they come from or who they are. It means that the dialect in the novel has a relation with sociolinguistics and cultural perspectives in literary dialect analysis.

Dialect in literature is called literary dialect. It is the implementation of nonstandard spellings that is generally used in novels and short stories with the aim to provide and reveal a real picture of an authentic speech to readers. Dialect that is used in literature is written another way in a standard form with the purpose of getting a large and distinctive readership, literate and illiterate ones (Iles. 2014:17). According to Ives in Iles (2014:17), literary dialect is considered as a means “to represent a speech in writing that is restricted regionally, socially or both”. That is, dialect in literature is used by the author to reveal a character’s regional or social status and at the same time by providing an exact picture of the original speech of each character.

Cultural elements or folkloric beliefs are still presented in some regions and societies which are part of the African American culture of that time. They are including riddle, sorcery, superstition, anecdotes, saying and proverb. The cultural aspects come together with the dialect of the user. This aspect is part of culture because culture is often embedded and transmitted through stories, whether they are appear as learning devices, or whether they appear more subtly, for example in

humors, jokes (anecdotes), superstitions, sayings, and riddles. It means how people react is symbolizing something; it can symbolize where they come from or who they are.

The primary source of this study is *The Help* novel which is originally written in English. It contains samples of dialects as the written representation of dialectical speech. *The Help* is a 2009 novel on the experiences of Black women in Jackson in the 1960s. The Black women are Aibileen Clark and Minny Jackson. They speak an Afro-American dialect. The dialect was used only for the black characters and not for the white characters. They speak the language in which it is categorized as the lower class in the view of White people. This story is written by a White woman who decided to use an Afro-American dialect. Black people are looked down upon by the rich White people of Jackson: they are required to use their own toilet, are not allowed to do their grocery shopping at the same supermarket as the White people and are considered unhygienic (Tempert, 2012:4).

This study uses *The Help* novel since it provides various cultural elements that are written in vernacular variety and known as African American Vernacular English. Furthermore, this study takes an interest in how dialects work in written text or it can be called literary dialect. On the other hand, literary dialect analysis tends to be unavailable if the study neglects the cultural side which is necessary to the linguistics study and social background. Therefore cultural aspect and literary dialect are analyzed thoroughly to describe the communication pattern and meaning in this study. Moreover, the identification of the data from the main

only racially since not all black Americans speak this variety of English, there are also people who do not belong to the American society but may still use it (Iles. 2014:16).

Kathryn Stockett is a newcomer to the literary genre of Southern fiction, was born in 1969 and raised in Jackson Mississippi. Her geographical birthplace and firsthand knowledge of the South and its historical legacy of slavery and racism have provided her with the background needed to follow the Southern tradition of literature.(Tempert, 2012:3)

Language Variety is a set of linguistic forms used under the specific social aspects with a distinctive social distribution. Variety is therefore a wide term which includes different accents, different linguistic styles, different dialects and even different languages which contrast with each other for social reasons (Holmes, 2013: 6).

The explanation above has discussed the definition of language and the ability of people in knowing a language, the sounds and the words. After knowing them then people will know the rules for their combination. The rule in using the language is known as grammar of a language which develops when you acquire the language and includes the sound system or *phonology*, the structure of the words or *morphology*, the way the words are combined into phrases and sentences or *syntax*, the ways in which sounds and meanings are related or *semantics*, and the words or *lexicon*. The sounds and meanings of these words are related in an *arbitrary* term (28). All in all language is a system that relates sounds with meanings. When you know a language you know this system.

2.2 Language Variation

Language variation is used by speaker in the society to say something in the same language differently. This variety includes different accents, different linguistic styles, different dialects and even different languages. Holmes (2013: 2) stated that languages provide a variety of ways of saying the same thing such as greeting, describing things, and paying compliments.

Linguistic variation can provide the social information. It is because the choice of people in using language will illustrate their social factors, such as the relationship between the speaker in certain situation, and how the speaker's feeling toward the hearer. Language choice of people deals with their social background and geographical background of the language user. This lead the user has different types of linguistic variation include word choice or vocabulary, and

stories of three dynamic women deal with the problems of segregation and race relations taking place in Mississippi in the 1960's. The African-American Civil Rights Movement and the momentous historical events taking place at this time create a backdrop for a tale of loving compassion and sacrifice.

Kathryn Stockett is a newcomer to the literary genre of Southern fiction. Her geographical birthplace and firsthand knowledge of the South and its historical legacy of slavery and racism have provided her with the background needed to follow the Southern tradition of literature.

Stockett claims to have decided to use the dialect because it was a voice that was familiar to her, that made her feel like home and that she wrote it how she remembered it (Suddath). Two of the three main characters are black women who speak in the Afro- American vernacular and this dialect is present in nearly every sentence of the book.

2.6.2 Synopsis of *The Help*

The Help is a 2009 novel on the experiences of black women in Jackson in the 1960s. This story is written by a white woman who decided to use an Afro-American dialect. *The Help* describes the story of three women living in the state of Mississippi during the early 1960s. Black people are looked down upon by the rich white people of Jackson: they are required to use their own toilet, are not allowed to do their grocery shopping at the same supermarket as the white people and are considered unhygienic.

First protagonist character is Aibileen Clark who works for Miss Elizabeth Leefolt and takes care of Miss Leefolt's daughter, Mae Mobley. Mae Mobley is a two-year old girl who receives little love from her own mother. Throughout the story Aibileen repeatedly tries to teach the girl how to love and respect herself. The second protagonist character is Eurgenia Pheelan, also known as Skeeter, a young white woman and a university graduate with writing ambitions. She begins to write a book about the black helps of Jackson. She gets the first help from Aibileen then followed by Minny Jackson, Aibileen's younger friend. The third protagonist character is Minny, a wife and a mother of five children. Minny first worked for Miss Walters and later for both Miss Walters and her daughter, Hilly. Then she works for Miss Celia Rae Foote after having problems with both Miss Walters and Hilly. Minny then attempts to teach Miss Celia how to cook, clean and do the laundry.

In helping the Skeeter's project, Minny is afraid of the possible consequences of the publishing novel. She worries if she will lose her job and she will no longer be safe in her own neighbourhood. In addition, she is afraid of her husband's bad temper if he knows her participation on Skeeter's project. However, the black community then belief and help the finishing of Skeeter's book until the publishing agent, Elaine Stein, agrees to consider the book if Skeeter is able to find more than twelve helps to tell her about their lives as maids. Skeeter eventually manages to do so and not much later her book, called *The Help*, is published. The book soon becomes so popular (6).

Then, the content analysis is a technique that enables researchers to study human behavior indirectly through the analysis of their communication. Krippendorff in Drisko and Maschi (2016:2) defines *content analysis* generally as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use.” Those definitions of content analysis paid attention to the manifest content of messages which refers to what was presented in a communication. The using of content analysis technique in this study was aimed to uncover the African American Vernacular English (AAVE) features that were used by Aibileen and Minny in the novel through a close reading to the text and answer the research question by interpreting the text.

As with many models of qualitative research, Mayring in Drisko and Maschi (2016: 85), added that *qualitative content analysis* is a set of techniques for the systematic analysis of texts of many kinds addressing not only manifest content but also the themes and core ideas found in texts as primary content. Contextual information and latent content were included in qualitative content analysis. Analysis of the formal aspects of the content might also be included. “Formal aspects” here meant how narratives are formatted and delivered; it includes form and processes as well as overt content. Hence, the writer conducted qualitative content analysis research to find out the pattern of AAVE and the cultural element inside it. Therefore, the writer read the novel especially the text that related with Aibileen and Minny utterances from the first until the sixteenth chapters as the data of this study.

Example 16:

Mae Mobley : “Mae Mo **been bad**,”
 Aibileen : “No, baby, you ain’t **been bad**,” smoothing her
 hair back. “You **been good**. Real good.”
 (Stockett, 2009: 15)

The example above is the conversation between Aibileen and Mae Mobley. Mae Moe says “*Mae Mo been bad*”, it becomes “*Mae Mo has been bad*”. Then Aibileen answers it; “*No, baby, you ain’t been bad, You been good. Real good.*” If it comes to the right grammatical rules will become: “*No, baby, you has not been bad, You have been good. Really good.*” Another example is presented below:

Example 17:

Aibileen : “Minny, **I been meaning** to ask you.” Aibileen
 clears her throat. “You know that Miss Skeeter?”
 Minny : “Tall one, used to come over to Miss Walters for
 bridge?”
 Aibileen : “Yeah, what you think about her?”
 Minny : “I don’t know, she white just like the rest of em.
 (Stockett, 2009:45)

Aibileen says to Minny asking whether Minny knows Miss Skeeter or not: “*Minny, I been meaning to ask you. You know that Miss Skeeter?*” while the sentence will be: “*Minny, I have been meaning to ask you. Do you know Miss Skeeter?*” in Standard English. Meanwhile, there are only five times found in Minny’s utterance, one of them is like the dialogues below:

Example 18:

Miss Celia : “Alright,” concentrating hard. “What’s next?”
 Minny : “**Chicken’s been soaking** in the buttermilk,”.
 “Now mix up the dry.”
 (Stockett, 2009: 44)

Example 22:

- Aibileen :“She say don’t tell nobody bout her tip on Minny, cause all her friends want a hire her and **they be real** upset if they find out she give her to somebody else.”
- Miss Celia :“I won’t tell her secret if she won’t tell mine. I don’t want my husband to know I’m hiring a maid.” (Stockett, 2009:26)

The above sentence; “...*they be real upset if they find out...*” is uttered by Aibileen to Miss Celia in AAVE dialect, it will be; “...*they are really upset if they find out...*” in Standard English which indicates the frequent event. Minny also uses “Be” rather than the proper to be of the tenses like the example below:

Example 23:

- Aibileen : “Minny, I know you honest. God know you honest.”
- Minny : “When I walk into Miss Walters’, **Miss Hilly be** there and she try to give me twenty dollars. She say, ‘Take it. I know you need it,’ and I bout spit in her face. But I didn’t. No sir.”
“I did *worse*.” (Stockett, 2009:21)

Twice instances of “Be” of these markers are found in Minny utterance, one of them is like the quotation above. The sentence; “... *Miss Hilly be there..*” is uttered by Minny, and it becomes “... *Miss Hilly is often there..*” in Standard English. Both of Aibileen and Minny use these markers. They use “Be” rather than the proper to be of the tenses.

g. No Be and No Copula

There is no BE and no copula if the condition is not recurring or repeated. This pattern is used by Aibileen 15 times in the novel or around

Example 36:

Aibileen :“I’m sorry. I thought I was . . . ready to talk.”
 “I just . . . I know you already told that lady in New York **I’s gone** do this but ..”
 “I’m sorry. I don’t think I can. I think I need to lay down.”
 Miss. Skeeter:“Tomorrow night. I’ll . . . come up with a better way. Let’s just try again and . . .”
 (Stockett, 2009: 146)

The AAVE features in *The Help* novel often shows the opposite in using ‘verb be’. The black characters prefer to use ‘is’ for the subject ‘I’, ‘you’, ‘they’, ‘we’ and ‘are’ or ‘were’ for the subject ‘She’ or ‘He’ and ‘It’. Such as the example above: “*I’s gone do this but ..* .” It should be “*I am going to do this but ..* .” in which it uses *to be* ‘am’ for the first person ‘I’. Then the conversation below shows another example that is appeared in Minny’s utterance:

Example 37:

Minny :“I ain’t afraid a no windows. I clean Miss Walters’ top to bottom ever four weeks.”
 Miss. Skeeter :“Did she have just the one floor or a double decker?”
 Minny : “Well, one . . . but **they’s** a lot to it. Old houses got a lot a nooks and crannies, you know.” (Stockett, 2009: 34)

Minny’s dialogue above uses ‘is’ as *verb befor* the pronoun ‘they; “*but they’s a lot to it.*” That sentence should be “*but they are a lot to it.*” in which the suitable ‘to be’ is ‘are’ according to the context of the sentence.

elements are found. In his thesis, he investigates the cultural aspects and dialectal elements used in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. The most often feature of cultural element that exists in *The Help* is ‘saying’ while in *Iles* is ‘superstition’. It is because in *Iles*, Jim is considered a superstitious character in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as in; “said you mustn’t count the things you are going to cook for dinner, because that would bring bad luck” (Iles, 2014: 60). In addition to this, Stockett entails in her novel ‘a saying’ that is the most common features exist in *The Help* to reveal the folkloric belief of characters such as “things is best when they in season” (Stockett, 2009: 125). It is used by Minny as a kind of advice which means that everything done by anyone is according to the season which follows it. Besides that, ‘saying’, as part of an advice is handed down from generation to generation and usually said by the older people, and it is most often used by Abileen since she is older than Minny.

The cultural aspects come together with the dialect of the user. This aspect is part of culture because culture is often embedded and transmitted through stories, whether they appear as learning devices, or whether they appear more subtly, for example in humor and jokes (anecdotes), superstition, saying, or riddle. It means how people react is symbolizing something; it can symbolize where they are come from or who they are.

In addition, the writer tries to add another point of view that relates to this study. Language is a tool to communicate with others, even though there are many different languages in this world but people can still communicate with other people. The different language, of course, will show who we are and where we are

the fact that a person has debased and humiliated the other person is enough to declare him a criminal.

The command in the Qur'an is not only to make peace but to make peace with justice and equity. This shows that in the sight of Allah the peace is brought to stop fighting, overlooking the distinction between the truth and falsehood or stop underestimate other people.

As this study talks about the African American Vernacular English which is used by Black people, there are many name related to the naming of this group of people. The example for the naming of this variety is like, Negro, Black people, Black Africans and many others. However the word 'Black' is the most commonly used to call this variety. On another hand, this naming, of course will make the people who are the members of the group name get offended. In a Muslim belief, God requires that a person should not be called by a name or a title which may cause humiliation to them. This includes giving such a nickname to a person, or a family, or a community, or a group, which may bring condemnation or disgrace on it.

All in all AAVE dialect is applied in the novel and it can be identified not only in spoken but also in written. The identification includes three possible linguistic aspects; grammar, phonology and vocabulary. Furthermore, it is concluded that the discussion of cultural elements in this study can provide the cultural backgrounds of the user and social parameters that characterize the dialect user as age, gender and social status. Therefore, it is summarized that dialect is

In conclusion, the writer has found that African American Vernacular English (AAVE) can be analyzed in written text and it can be called literary dialect. This study can reveal the pattern of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) which is used by the two main characters as a black woman in *The Help*. Moreover, the identification of the representation of cultural element which comes together with the using of dialect by the character reveals that the dialect can symbolize where they come from or who they are.

5.2 Suggestion

This research is primarily on the written text. The result shows that AAVE has features that unique and different with other dialect. This study has successfully revealed the identification of AAVE in written text and by looking at the cultural elements; the writer can show that the dialect can symbolize the background of the user. Therefore, for further research, the writer suggests to explore more about AAVE from different aspect. It would be interesting to identify the features of AAVE in two or more literary works as the comparative studies. The further researcher can also decide the studies in two different ways; it can be both in written and spoken. On the other hand, the language users are suggested to understand the language not only in standard form but also in unstandard form to help them knowing that diversity. Furthermore, the language learners are suggested to not only explore new knowledge of African American Vernacular English but also understand its development.

