

The portrayal of colored people in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960)

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ABSTRACT

This study is a transitivity analysis of the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee (1960). This study aims to investigate representation of a colored man named Tom Robinson through the types of process related to Tom Robinson. By using qualitative research, the research used the theory of Transitivity proposed by Halliday (1994). The data sources were in the form of eighteen clauses that specifically represent Tom Robinson and were sorted by concordance software Antconc 3.8.1. The findings of the research showed that there are four processes found in the clauses related to the character. Material process is the most frequent process (50%) followed by Relational process (27%) which are divided into two: Attributive Relational process (22%) and Identifying Relational Process (5%), Mental process (17%), and Verbal process (7%) are the second lowest and least frequent type in this research. The result of the research indicates that Tom Robinson as one of the people of color in the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* is represented as a man who experienced social injustice.

Keywords: *Representation, Systemic Functional Linguistics, Ideational Meaning, Transitivity*

INTRODUCTION

Racism is a global issue that is still experienced by certain people nowadays. According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, racism is a belief where race is the foremost determinant of someone's attitude and capacity, and racial differences create the superiority of a particular race. Based on the definition above, racial inequalities involve major groups that construct dominance and minor groups that are oppressed by the majority. However, racial discrimination is linked to colored people. Rich-Edwards et al. (2001) state that people of color in the US experienced racism among social classes. They also assume that racism has a relation with the economy and social class of a person. Furthermore, the effect of racism influences social justice, where people in general, including police officers, often mistreat people of color.

There are a few number of cases involving people of color who are mistreated or even killed by police officers in some countries where people of color exist, especially America. The media construct a stigma for black males of being a criminal. They project the negative images of black males to sustain white supremacy. The result of the black males' criminalization is that the public supports criminal justice policies targeted at black males. Smith & Merolla (2019) state that the term racism is evolving to be more subtle than it was. The old-fashioned racial prejudice has been replaced by the new racial prejudice. Those who follow these new prejudice called "modern",

"symbolic", or "color-blind" prejudice, still hold negative attitude towards people of color. However, rather than asserting these negative attributes towards innate racial differences, they attribute these negative attitude towards non-racial cultural or behavioral characteristics of racial minorities.

There have been several researches focusing on the representation of black males. Page (1997) examines the representation of black males in media. Page found that the action that considered positive by other black males are seem to be negative from the mainstream perspective. Bell & Harris (2016) investigate the representation of black masculinity and emasculation in NBC's television series entitled *Parenthood*. Bell & Harris use Owen's thematic analysis to reveal the representation of black males in *Parenthood*. They find that black males are depicted as societal failures, hypersexual, criminals, and violent.

Other than studies on the media and television, there are also some researchers that investigate the matter in printed forms. Pescosolido, Grauerholz & Milkie (1997) analyze the representation of black males in children's picture books in the mid and late-twentieth century. The result shows that black people are visually eliminated from children's books at the time when there is no uncertainty of racial relations. Kuriakose (2016) investigates colored woman representation in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. She finds that female characters in the novel are represented

as women who are struggling with both gender and racial oppression as well as women who experienced sexual abuse as the impact of patriarchy. Schug, Alt, Lu, Gosin, & Fay (2015) observe the invisibility of black and Asian in popular magazines. They find that Asian men and Black women are more likely to be invisible than Asian women and Black men in popular magazines. Tram (2018) investigates the feature of relationship between relational process elements in the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The result shows that three main types which are intensive, circumstantial, and possessive. Two modes of relational process were found in the novel which are attributive and identifying. Furthermore, the three main types and the two modes set up six subtypes of the relation. The subtypes are intensive clause: attribute, intensive clause: identifying, circumstantial clause: attribute, circumstantial clause: identifying, possessive clause: attribute, and possessive clause: identifying.

The present research investigates a novel entitled *To Kill a Mockingbird*. However, different from previous research, the present research is using the system of transitivity as the tool of analysis to unravel the representation of people of color in the novel. By using transitivity, the representation of Tom Robinson can be drawn since transitivity deals with clause as representation. In addition, differ from what Tram (2018) analyze in his research, the present research aims to identify the types of processes found in the clauses that have a relation with a character named Tom Robinson. Revealing a character's representation

that experiences racism may establish the sign of a person who is also experiencing racism in real life. The present research also aims to explain how the people of color, specifically Tom Robinson, is represented in the novel "*To Kill a Mockingbird*."

METHODOLOGY

The present research applied descriptive qualitative method. The data were taken from a novel entitled *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee in 1960. In order to reveal the portrayal of colored people in the novel "*To Kill a Mockingbird*", the system of ideational metafunction of systemic functional linguistics, which was proposed by Halliday (1994) had been used as the tool to uncover the representation of people of color through texts written in the novel. The data for this research were taken from novel entitled *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee (1960). The data were in the form of clauses. The clauses were chosen using concordance software with keyword Tom Robinson. There were sixty clauses in total, but only eighteen clauses that were considered representing the typicality of Tom Robinson. The chosen clauses were both independent and dependent clause that consisted of the word Tom Robinson in it. The concordance software used as the tool to sort the intended sentences is Antconc 3.5.8, which was downloaded from the internet. The keyword Tom Robinson was chosen because Tom Robinson is the only black character in the novel *To*

Kill a Mockingbird that experienced racism in the story.

The data were in the form of e-novel that was downloaded through the internet. Then, the novel was exported to the '.txt' format so that the concordance software could detect the novel in corpus format. Later, the data was sorted by using the keyword Tom Robinson. The collected data were divided into clauses based on the number that appeared in the concordance software. Later, the clauses were analyzed by using the theory transitivity that is proposed by Halliday (1994) by identifying the process in the clause. Then, conclusion was drawn based on the dominant clause that represent Tom Robinson.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the verbal analysis, forty-eight clauses related with Tom Robinson, as one of the people of color, are found in the novel "To Kill a Mockingbird." Those sixty clauses contain five processes. Those processes are material process, relational attributive process, relational identifying process, mental process, and verbal process respectively. In addition, based on the analyzed data, thirty clauses use material process, thirteen clauses use relational attributive process, three clauses are using relational identifying process, ten clauses are using mental process, and four clauses are using the verbal process. The following table shows processes that are found in the novel through concordance software.

Table 1 Types of process of the analyzed data

Process	Frequency	Percentage
Material	30	50%
Relational attributive	13	22%
Relational identifying	3	5%
Mental	10	17%
Verbal	4	7%
Behavioral	-	-
Existential	-	-
Meteorological	-	-
Total	58	100%

Based on the table above, it can be seen that the dominant process used in the novel to represent Tom Robinson is material process. Eggins (1994) states that material is process of doing. It means that the process involves physical movement and establishes the doer and the receiver of it. Through material process, Tom Robinson is depicted both as an actor and a goal of the process. However, Tom Robinson is often depicted as a goal that is attached to process, which is often related to have negative connotation. For example in the clause "She must put Tom Robinson away from her", Tom Robinson is represented as something that should be avoided because the use of the words 'put away' is usually connected with something negative, like put away the garbage or the dirty laundry. Hence, the use of those words in relation to someone, in this case Tom Robinson, shows that Tom is depicted

with negative connotation since he should be avoided.

The next process that is identified in the novel is relational process. According to Eggins (2004), relational process is process of being. In addition, Thompson (2014) states that relational process is divided into two; attributive and identifying. Based on the analysis, the novel uses more attributive relational process to represent Tom Robinson. It means that certain quality that is attributed to Tom Robinson has appeared more than the identification of Tom Robinson as an entity. In the clause “Tom Robinson’s a colored man”, the word colored is attributed to Tom while Tom Robinson is represented as Carrier who carries the attribute. Based on the analysis, Tom Robinson is represented as colored man; a person of a race other than white and mixed race according to Merriam Webster (2020). Furthermore, Cambridge Dictionary states that the word colored as an adjective means having a dark skin. In addition, specifically in the US, the word colored is used for family whose origin is from Africa and the word colored is now considered offensive.

The other process found in the novel is mental process. Gerot and Wignell (1994) state that mental process is a process of sensing: feeling, thinking, perceiving. Tom Robinson is often depicted as phenomenon. In the clause “I know Tom Robinson’s in jail”, I is represented as senser, know as mental, Tom Robinson as Phenomenon, and Jail as Circumstance. The jail as circumstance, which complements Tom Robinson as Phenomenon, suggests that

Tom is a criminal. The circumstance signifies the representation of Tom Robinson in the clause.

The last process that is found in the clause is verbal process. Halliday (2004) states that verbal process helps in creating narratives by making possible dialogic passages. The doer of the process is called Sayer while the outcome is Verbiage. In the clause “he said that they’d moved Tom Robinson to the Maycomb jail”, Tom Robinson is represented as verbiage. The verbiage contains other process, which is identified as material process. The word they’d is represented as Actor, moved is the material, Tom Robinson represented as the goal, and to the Maycomb jail is the circumstances. The word Jail in circumstance signifies Tom Robinson’s representation, which most likely represent Tom as a person who does something terrible so that Tom should be punished in Jail.

Discussion

Based on transitivity analysis, the dominant process that emerges in the clause is material process. Based on the analyzed clause, Tom Robinson as one of the colored character is represented as goal (six times), carrier (four times), phenomenon (three times), circumstance (two times), attribute (two times), and token (one time), respectively. As a goal, Tom Robinson is associated with verbs put away, moved, save, help, defend, and happen. In the verb put away, Tom Robinson was perceived as someone who is likely to have a bad behavior because somebody has to put him away. In the verb moved, Tom Robinson’s

representation is detailed with the circumstance jail. It adds the detail where Tom Robinson is being moved. Furthermore, jail is often associated with those who has bad behavior because jail is a place for criminals. In the verb save, help, and defend, Tom Robinson is represented as a helpless man because he is the one that receives the actions, he needs somebody to save, help, and defend him. In the verb happen, Tom Robinson's representation is detailed by the circumstance until the higher court reviewed his case. The word case in the circumstance indicates that Tom Robinson is someone with big trouble because it requires the higher court to review it.

As a carrier, Tom Robinson, his manner, and his existence carries certain attributes such as ever brought to their attention, forgotten as Boo Radley, a colored man, and as good as Atticus'. Ever brought to their attention is attributed to Tom Robinson's existence. The clause Tom Robinson's existence was ever brought to their attention also stands as phenomenon to the verb forget. The verb forget indicates the representation of Tom Robinson through his existence that Tom Robinson is a forgotten man. Tom Robinson carries the attribute forgotten as Boo Radley, which indicates that Tom Robinson is as forgettable as the forgotten Boo Radley. As a carrier, Tom Robinson is attributed with the attribute a colored man. The attribute of colored man is enhancing the fact that he has a dark skin. Moreover, the attribute elaborates the representation of colored people as someone who is powerless, bad, and unimportant. Tom

Robinson manner is labeled as a carrier and it is assigned the attribute of as good as Atticus'. It indicates that Tom Robinson has as good manner as Atticus who likes to help people aside of his job as a lawyer.

As a phenomenon, Tom Robinson is related with verbs such as forgotten, and know. Tom Robinson is represented as the receiver of the 'mental' action. The verb forgotten indicates that Tom Robinson is a forgotten man. The verb know indicates that Tom Robinson is acknowledging the senser with his current condition such as Tom Robinson's in jail and Tom Robinson's trouble.

As a circumstance, Tom Robinson stands as the detail in the clause. He is related with words such as forgotten and lie. In the verb forgotten, Tom Robinson stands as a comparison towards Mr.Ewell who is also forgotten by the neighbor. The use of verb forgotten that is attached to Tom Robinson indicates that Tom Robinson is a forgotten man just like Mr.Ewell. In the verb lie, Tom Robinson's skin is represented as the comparison towards the lie, which metaphorically associates with black color. It indicates that Tom Robinson's black skin has the same value with a lie.

As attribute, the word Tom Robinson is associated with the name of somebody and is attributed to an answer, which answers the question 'who hurt someone'. As a name of someone, it indicates that Tom Robinson is a name for that particular person. As an answer, the word Tom Robinson is attributed towards the word

it that answers the question of 'who hurt someone'. It indicates that Tom Robinson as a person has hurt somebody. On the contrary of the indication that he has hurt someone, Tom as a token is associated with a value of being decent to particular person

Tom Robinson is mostly depicted as a man who has a bad behavior. It can be seen from the clause that associate him, which are jail and being put away. Being moved to jail indicates that Tom Robinson is a criminal. It corresponds with the idea that male people of color is overrepresented in prisons (Ogungbure, 2019). It indicates that black males are often associated with prison. Somehow it creates stereotypes that black males are criminals and they deserve to be in jail.

Tom Robinson is also associated with the word forget and being forgotten. Aside of being compared with another character in the story such as Mr.Ewell or Boo Radley, the use of the word forget and forgotten is still attached to Tom Robinson and it indicates that Tom Robinson being forgotten or is already forgotten by the people (neighborhood). It corresponds to the idea by Pescosolido (1997) that black males are visually eliminated in the children's books in the late 1950s until mid-1960s. The story in the children book takes place around the same time as the story in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Thus, it can be inferred that black people, in this case Tom Robinson in *To Kill a Mockingbird* is being implicitly eliminated from the story by how he is represented with

many negative connotations throughout the story.

Being put away and being forgotten is likely to be the stereotype of minority. The power of majority tends to corrupt the minority. The minorities are often forgotten, powerless, and seems to be wrong in every actions they made.

CONCLUSION

The existence of racial discrimination issue motivates the present study. The racial issue is often represented as the issue that harms minority such as the people of color. The issue is still prevalent even in the society nowadays, and even more in the past. Hence, many literary works try to bring out this issue, for instance the Pulitzer prize-winning (pake tahun nya kalau bisa) novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird* that becomes the data source for this study. Therefore, this study attempts to identify the dominant process and unravel the representation of the minority, specifically a character in the novel with colored skin, named Tom Robinson. In answering the research questions, the present study employs a qualitative method to achieve an in-depth linguistics comprehension of the social phenomenon, which is racial discrimination. The present research uses the theory of systemic functional linguistics, precisely the theory of transitivity proposed by Halliday (1994) as the framework theory to analyze the data.

After undertaking the research, conclusions can be drawn based on the results, which have been previously

discussed. It is found that the material process is the dominant process that appears in the data followed by relational attributive, relational identifying, mental and verbal process. Based on the processes found in the research, a man of color in the novel "To Kill a Mockingbird" namely Tom Robinson, is represented as a man of color who receives certain physical actions considered as a negative actions from the society. It is implied from the most dominant process found in the research, which is material process.

Tom Robinson in the selected clauses is dominantly represented as goal, carrier, phenomenon, circumstance, attribute, and token respectively. By being participants in the process, Tom Robinson is perceived as someone who is being a part of minority, which has bad behavior, unimportant, and powerless

The present study ends up with several suggestions for further studies. Firstly, in terms of data collection, it is suggested that further studies to use various ways of collecting data such as questionnaire. The use of questionnaire aims to give other perspectives to enrich the explanations or the descriptions of the results.

Secondly, in terms of the theory framework used in the research to analyze the data. The present research uses systemic functional linguistics theory proposed by Halliday (1994) and focuses in the transitivity system or ideational metafunction. It is best for the future researches to use another metafunctions such as interpersonal or textual metafunction.

Thirdly, in terms of the data taken for the present research. The present research takes clauses related to a people of colored named Tom Robinson. It would be better for further researches to focus on the other characters such as the Ewell or the Radley. It is also suggested that further research analyzes the same issue in other forms of printed or non-printed works.

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