

**SLAVERY SHOWN THROUGH THE PRESUPPOSITIONS OF THE CHARACTERS
IN THE MOVIE *HARRIET* (2019)**

Baiq Intan Pratiwi ^(a), Ni Made Widisanti S ^(a*), Sari Rejeki ^(a)

^(a)Universitas Pakuan, Bogor, Indonesia

^(*)Email correspondence: wsarkana@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to describe the presupposition and common ground of the movie *Harriet* which was released in 2019. This study uses a qualitative research with descriptive analysis method. The data source of this study is obtained from the script of the movie. The data analyzed are utterances between the movie characters which contain presupposition elements. This study is executed by using the discourse perspective of slavery. The result shows that there are 17 data containing presupposition; 5 counter-factual presuppositions, 5 potential presuppositions, 5 structural presuppositions and 2 factive presuppositions. These result indicate that there are only 4 types of presuppositions found in this study while the other 2 types of presuppositions (lexical and non-factive presuppositions) even though they contain presuppositions, there is no element of slavery in them. From this research, it can be concluded that presuppositions depict the discourse of slavery that surrounds the movie.

Keywords: presupposition; common ground; discourse of slavery; movie.

I. BACKGROUND

Linguistic studies spoken language in various fields including film. One of its fields of study is Pragmatics, the study of language. According to Leech in Nadar (2009: 1), Pragmatics has a close relationship with Semantics. In Pragmatics, meaning is defined in relation to speakers or language users, while in Semantics, meaning is defined solely as features of expressions in a particular language, separate from the situation, speakers and interlocutors.

Pragmatics deals with the study of meaning as communicated by a speaker and interpreted by the interlocutor. Pragmatics is a study of the meaning of speakers (Yule, 2006: 1). Basically speakers converse in a context with the aim of exchanging information or messages. Yule (2006: 1) says a presupposition is something that is assumed by speakers as a case before making an utterance. Based on the understanding explained by Yule, a presupposition appears in a conversation whose presence is indirectly understood by the speaker.

The presupposition itself comes from the word 'to pre-suppose', which means in the sense that before the speaker says something, he already has a previous guess about the interlocutor or what is being discussed by the speaker and the interlocutor (Putrayasa, 2014 : 77). In addition, Hadiyani in Putrayasa (2014: 77) reveals that presuppositions are background information, assumed by speakers to be known as facts by the interlocutor.

Presupposition in a conversation is closely related to the common ground between the speaker and the interlocutor. Common ground can be interpreted as being owned by speakers and opponents said in a conversation. Common ground is shared by speakers and interlocutors who have close relationships such as family or close friends. The closer the relationship between the speaker and the interlocutor, the more common ground the two have. Speakers and interlocutors who are just acquaintances or do not know each other have less common ground (Jucker and Smith, 1995: 3). Common ground is not only found in everyday conversations, but can also be analyzed through the utterances between the characters in the dialogue in the movie. *Harriet* is taken as a medium for

this study as it is rich in analysis related with presupposition, common ground and the issue of slavery.

II. RESEARCH METHOD

This research is a qualitative research that will be analyzed by using descriptive analysis method. The technique used in this research is library research technique by observing the corpus, which is the film *Harriet* and supporting theories from theory books, scientific journals, and articles that support the discussion of this research.

In this study, the theory used is the notion of presupposition by Yule (2006). The idea of presupposition is an assumption by the speaker before they produce an utterance. Yule also identifies five type of presuppositions; factive, lexical, structural, non-factive and counterfactual.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The following are the types of presuppositions found in *Harriet's* movie and their analysis:

1. Counterfactual presupposition

The conversation in this scene involves Edward Brodess, Gideon Brodess and also Harriet in the courtyard of the Brodess residence. The context of the conversation in this scene begins when Harriet asks for a promise from the Brodess family to free the status of a slave when her child is born, but Edward Brodess rejects her. Edward then blames Gideon because if it weren't for Gideon's wish, Harriet would have been sold to the south along with the other sisters.

(3) Edward: *If it weren't for you, I would have sold that girl a long time ago.*

(4) Gideon: *(staring at his father) (sigh) (00: 07: 34-00: 07: 56)*

Speech (3) assumes that **Edward did something for Gideon and that something has happened**. The assumption of Edward's utterance is a statement that contradicts the actual facts at the time of the conversation because in fact Edward did something according to Gideon's wishes even though it was against Edward's own will. This assumption is based on Edward's statement that blames Gideon for the events that have occurred. The common ground shared by the two is that **Edward refuses to free Harriet's child slave status**. This common ground is obtained based on Edward's annoyed speech about Harriet's request for his son to be free from slave status. The issue of slavery that is found is that based on Edward's statement, the trading activity of slaves at that time is a common thing. This proves that Harriet's value is nothing more than a material that can be exchanged for money.

2. Potential Presuppositions

This conversation involves Eliza Brodess and her son Gideon Brodess in the study. The context of the conversation begins when they discuss the enormous debt owes by Eliza's late husband, Edward. Eliza intends to borrow money from their distant relatives to cover their debt bondage but is later opposed by Gideon. Gideon suggests selling half of the slaves they own whom Eliza fiercely refuses.

(3) Gideon: *We're gonna have to sell some slaves, Mama.*

(4) Eliza: **Our stature** in this community is measured in Negroes. We can't live like paupers (00: 48: 43-00: 48: 53)

Speech (4) shows the assumption that **there are people who have stature**. This assumption is based on the facts about the status of the Brodess family. The common ground shared from the conversation between Gideon and Eliza is that **the Brodess family is experiencing economic difficulties**. This common ground is obtained based on the context of the conversation between Gideon and Eliza who are worried about their financial condition. The issue of slavery itself is that the quantity of slaves are owned by the Brodess family which indicates their social status. Slaves themselves are valued as private property of material value and can be used as a long-term investment if they produce offspring.

3. Structural Presupposition

This conversation takes place between William and Harriet in William's office when they first met. The context of this conversation begins with scenes Harriet who escapes and meets William and how he manages to escape. He also asks about what kind of violence Harriet experiences while working there.

(5) William: *Did your master ever harm you physically? Do you have wounds or scars from beatings?*

(6) Harriet: *Overseer cracked my head open when I was about 13. (00: 36: 44-00: 36: 57)*

Speech (6) assumes that **there is someone who is 13 years old at the time**. This assumption is based on what happened to Harriet when he was around 13 years old. The common ground between the two is that **Harriet is tortured**. This common ground can be

understood through the context of a conversation between William and Harriet where Harriet suffered physical injuries at that age. The issue of slavery that exists is that there is content of torture that Harriet experienced while working as a slave at Brodess's residence. Harriet's identity as a slave is the reason the torture occurs because physical violence is common and it is commonplace when employers feels that their slave have done something wrong.

4. Active Presupposition

This conversation involves Harriet and William in William's office. The context for this conversation is when Harriet, who has a bad feeling for the safety of his family, plans to return to the Brodess residence to take them away from there. He asks William for help but is immediately refused firmly because he is worried about Harriet's safety.

(7) William: *Do you know what would happen if you got caught? They would torture you until you pointed them right to this office. You got lucky, Harriet. And there's nothing more you can do.*

(8) Harriet: *Don't you tell me what I can't do (00: 44: 25-00: 44: 32)*

Speech (7) assumes **something might happen**. William's assumption is based on William's concern for Harriet's safety. The common ground that William and Harriet have in the conversation is **Harriet's decision to go to Brodess's residence**. This common ground is obtained through the context of a conversation between William and Harriet when Harriet intends to return to save his family. The issue of slavery that is found is that slavery cannot be separated from the torturous

activity that the employer carries out on their slaves as William utters when Harriet intends to go to Brodess's residence.

IV. CONCLUSION

There are 17 utterances which contain presupposition related with the issue of slavery. In terms of types, the data reveals there are 5 counter-factual presuppositions, 5 potential presuppositions, 5 structural presuppositions, and 2 factive presuppositions. Each presupposition of utterances found in this film has a meaning that can be found directly or in writing in utterances or indirectly or obtained through interpretation of the context of the conversation.

Apart from examining the types of presuppositions, common ground and issues of slavery are also at the core of this study. Common ground in this study can be found through an understanding agreement between the speaker and the interlocutor in the conversation. common ground can occur if there is an agreement of understanding and also a close relationship between the speaker and the interlocutor. The closer the relationship between the speaker and the interlocutor, the more possibilities for common ground that can create presuppositions between the two of

them. Conversely, if the distance between the speaker and the interlocutor is, the less common ground that would be created and has a presupposition.

The issue of slavery is analyzed in this study so that readers can understand more deeply each existing presupposition and can understand that social issues can also be studied in any presupposition of utterances. The issue of slavery is obtained through the context of the conversation and also the shared knowledge that is then linked and described in the form of a sentence.

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