

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

Throughout the world, groups of people use language as a tool of communication. Each group normally uses the same language to deliver their message and to understand one another. Nevertheless, in this world, there are many countries and each of them has different languages. For instance, according to a research by O'Neil (2011), linguists estimate that there are 6000-7000 languages used all over the world, meanwhile there are only approximately 260 countries in the world ("A World Countries List," n.d.). This large number shows that there are more different languages used in one country. That is mostly caused by having different regions in a country. Aside of national language that is owned by a country, there are other minor languages that are spread along within their regions. These minor languages can be classified as dialects. Every language including English, the subject of this research, has its own distinct characteristics that differ from its standard language. Dialect, according to Haugen in Wardhaugh (1992: 25), is different from language, it is not related to standard language, it represents the language exclusion from polite society form of a language, or some call it non standard language, or in this subject, English. Moreover, dialect does not stand alone, according to Finegan (1999: 15) ethnic, socioeconomic, and gender and age groups also determine dialect. Seeing this, it is proven that ethnicity and dialect are connected to each other.

Back to non standard language, from its name, the feel of inferiority and negativity comes in an instant. This is why Holmes referred non standard language as vernacular language. In her book, Holmes (2008: 75) stated that 'The term

vernacular language is used in a number of ways. It generally refers to a language that has not been standardized and which does not have official status.’ She also added that vernacular generally related to the most colloquial variety in a person’s linguistic repertoire that is used mostly between friends and family to mark the solidarity between people in the same ethnicity. From this, ethnicity is obviously linked to dialect or vernacular term; since people are speaking the same language to identify their ethnicity and to feel that they belong to the same group of ethnic.

People then often identify themselves using the vernacular language that distinguishes their ethnicity. Obviously when speaking of vernacular language, it is different from standard language, a proper language that has been through a process of ‘standardization’ (Hudson, 1987: 32). Like Standard English that is widely known and has been through the standardization process, vernacular language is also widely known among its speakers, but with no standardization process. Furthermore, vernacular or dialect, even though depicted as a non standard language has some distinctive features like vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Like how it is stated by Holmes (2008: 137) ‘dialects are simply linguistic varieties which are distinguishable by their vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation.’

Every language, as it is discussed in sociolinguistics study, has some factors influencing the use of language itself either it is economy, gender, or social network factor. The writer then tries to apply the social factors to ethnicity language to see the influence of the social network towards the ethnicity language. By applying the social factors to the language, the writer wants to analyze the connection between the environment of the people involved, the social network, and the language itself. How will it change the language and how far can the language change?

In this thesis, the writer chooses African American Vernacular English

Language, or AAVE, which is regularly and widely used as a language between African American people as it is stated by Finegan (1989: 395) “Probably the most widespread and most familiar ethnic variety of American English is African American Vernacular English (formerly called Black English or Black English Vernacular and now called Ebonics by some)”. AAVE has some characteristics that differentiate the language from other English varieties. There are phonological characteristics and grammatical characteristics like copula deletion, multiple negations, and the use of *it is* instead of *there is* (Finegan, 1989: 396). This language of AAVE has also been known in all over the world, even though the African American people aren’t present in our real life. That occurs because of the usage of AAVE in the movie, novel, or in any other literature matters which makes us know this language.

From the history, according to Fromkin and Rodman (1983: 259), AAVE was found and used by African American people when they worked as slaves with the Englishmen. In the first theory, the African Americans learned English as their second language. Because of the difficulty learning second language as adults, they spoke in different structures than most Englishmen did. The learned English was shared to their children and thus the children brought it along. They only spoke in their own environment and did not know what was the Standard English like. Therefore, they only spoke AAVE and that spread along the community even after they grew up. The second theory is the theory of the *pidgin* language. The slave traders gathered the African Americans who have different languages and thus cannot understand one another to avoid communication and slave rebellion. Therefore, to communicate, they created pidgin language originated from English language, but simpler. Thus the pidgin language eventually develops as the AAVE

between African Americans. Because of this history, and also the people using it, the slaves, AAVE is seen as inferior and negative dialect. However, according to Fromkin and Rodman (1983: 254), now African American people no longer consider their dialect to be inferior. Instead, it is a means of positive black identification.

Since African Americans get their rights, they began to show themselves and their languages into literature world. One movie featuring African Americans and their struggle, also portraying their vernacular dialect that is so different from Standard English, is *The Color Purple* movie. In this movie by Steven Spielberg, the AAVE is portrayed in the movie, along with its deep theme about social low class of an African American woman struggling to get happiness with her sister and gaining recognition from other 'white' people. In this movie there are two sisters: Celie and Nettie, the African American people, talk in African American Vernacular English Language from different social status and environment. This particular way they speak gives the writer reasons to do a research.

There are some previous research discussing syntactical and functional study of AAVE, for example, in the movie *A Raisin' in the Sun*, Huda (2010) found the syntactical structure of the AAVE used in the movie. The conclusion taken is that AAVE does not violate the grammar; it only simplifies the Standard English grammar. Mayangsari (2008) also found that the use of AAVE in the *Are We Done Yet?* movie has the purpose of gaining the audiences' interest because of its uniqueness. Aside of these syntactical and lexical characteristics of previous research, the writer decides to choose the linguistics and sociolinguistics side of AAVE in *The Color Purple* movie. The distinct way of the communication portrayed in this medium has also led the writer to pull a research in AAVE and the influence of the social factors causing the change of language in *The Color Purple* movie. By

doing this research, the writer wants to find out and to identify the AAVE used and the variations and changes of the AAVE related to the language change.

1.2 Problem Formulation

The problem formulations of this thesis are

1. What are the African American Vernacular English linguistic features used in *The Color Purple*?
2. What are the factors found influencing the change of AAVE language?

1.3 Scope and Limitations

The scope of this research is the linguistic theories of African American Vernacular English Language consist of phonological, morphological, syntactical, and lexical features; and language change in Sociolinguistics study. The data are limited to only African American Vernacular English spoken by characters in *The Color Purple* movie.

1.4 Goals and Functions

The goals of this research are:

1. To identify the linguistic features of AAVE used in the movie.
2. To categorize the linguistic features of AAVE found in the movie
3. To identify factors influencing the change of AAVE language in the movie.

Meanwhile, the functions of this research are:

1. To provide knowledge to people that languages differ in certain ethnicity in terms of linguistic and sociolinguistic factors,
2. To provide knowledge that AAVE language has linguistic features like Standard

English language, and

3. To provide knowledge that there is AAVE as a variation in communicative language other than Standard English.

1.5 Research Method

The library research method is used to conduct this research. To obtain descriptions of AAVE and its explanation, the writer becomes the main instrument by watching *The Color Purple*, collecting the subtitle and then classifying them according to the features analyzed. After that, the writer analyzed the data based on the theory of AAVE and language change. Lastly, the result concluded in order to answer the problem formulation.