

# Verbal Abuse in Multiracial Communication: A Sociolinguistic Perspective

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**Abstract**—Humans are naturally born into the world in a variety of different races and tribes. Diversity and difference is one form of cultural treasures of a nation if the people live collectively in the frame of tolerance and mutual respect for each other, thus avoiding various social conflicts. One of the factors that make vulnerable causes of conflict is the language factor. Language is one element of culture that has an important role in maintaining the harmony of diversity. Language is not only understood as a sign only but is also viewed as a social system, communication system, and as part of a particular cultural society. Language serves as a tool of communication in the life of society which consists of a variety of races, tribes through the polite language will be able to build a peaceful coexistence between different backgrounds of history, culture and identity. Verbal abuse in multiracial communication often becomes the trigger of social conflict in the midst of society. Verbal abuse often leads to conflict, because every word that becomes the expression of meaning and meaning is formed based on the perception and interpretation of people involved in the communication process. The inappropriateness of choice of words used will result in perceptions that do not match the expectations of the communicant. Errors of perception will be a major obstacle in the process of communication. If the obstacles are not managed properly it will lead to conflict and hostility. Verbal abuse does not only appear in socio-political life, but also in literary texts. This research was conducted to analyze how the portrayal of language violence in Jacqueline Woodson novels. The theme will be examined in terms of its impact on efforts to create a tolerant society. This study was conducted using a sociolinguistic perspective. The results of this study found violent forms of language in multiracial community communication. There are seven forms of verbal abuse found: countering, discounting, accusing and blaming, judging and criticizing, trivializing, threatening, and denial. Based on these findings it can be concluded that the relation of power and dominance also manifested in aspects of language that directly occur in everyday life, such as at home, in the office, space, class, playground and others. Everything is the context in which individuals spend most of their time interacting, using language to express their intentions, and following up on specific purposes.

**Keywords**—*multiracial; sociolinguistics; verbal abuse*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Humans use language in interacting with one another. Through the medium of human language can build relationships with others. On the other hand, language can be an obstacle and even bore a clash if not used properly and correctly in accordance with prevailing norms. In order not to happen clash or disputes, so it required attitude of tolerance,

mutual understanding and mutual respect. The attitude is manifest in tolerance. One of the triggers of conflict is verbal abuse. In English there is a saying "Zip your mouth" for the meaning of keeping the words. Maintain the mouth is an allegory to advise someone to be careful in speaking. In the context of Indonesia, there are specific rules for communication ethics for the state civil apparatus in which one of the rules relates to the ethics of expressing verbal or written opinion through social media containing hate speech against one tribe, religion, race, and among groups.

One of the most vulnerable forms of language conflict is verbal abuse in multiracial communication, for example, as occurs in multiracial societies in America. The issue of race differences is still a topic of debate in various discourses in America. The discourse on racism arises in academic, political, social, economic, and cultural environments constructed to support and oppose racism. The intensity of the debate on racism and racial riots tends to increase in the period 2016 to 2017, especially after the election of Donald Trump as president. The condition indicates that racism still exists and is still a polemic in American society. McCohanay (1981, p. 578) in his article entitled *Has Racism Declined in America? It Depends on Who Is Asking and What is Asked* states that the answer to the question of whether racism has decreased in America depends on who asks and what is asked. If asked to the white race community, they would answer that racism has been declining in America, because according to them the intensity of physical violence due to racism has decreased. In addition, in the public life sector such as schools, hospitals and government agencies are no longer formally enacting discriminatory laws against non-white races. Conversely, when asked to non-white race communities, they will reply that they still feel injustice and are often the victims of racism in a more private sphere, such as the environment and the household. The differences between white and non-white views of racism as described by McCohanay above suggest that racial relations in America are still problematic. The relationship between whites and non-whites is not a simple opposition between two physically different races, but a complex fabric in a social relationship within society. Verbal abuse does not appear in socio-political life, but also in literary texts.

This research was conducted to analyze how the portrayal of verbal abuse in Jacqueline Woodson novels. This study was conducted using a sociolinguistic perspective. The results of this study found violent forms of language in multiracial

community communication. There are seven forms of verbal abuse found: countering, discounting, accusing and blaming, judging and criticizing, trivializing, threatening, and denial. Based on these findings it can be concluded that the relation of power and dominance also manifested in aspects of language that directly occur in everyday life, such as at home, in the office, space, class, playground and others. Everything is the context in which individuals spend most of their time interacting, using language to express their intentions, and following up on specific purposes.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Language has an important role as a tool for self-expression and as a tool to communicate. Chaer (2010) states that for the sociolinguistic concept that language is a tool or function to convey the mind is considered too narrow, because the sociolinguistic problem is "who speak what language to whom, when and to what end". Therefore language functions can be seen from the point of speaker, listener, topic, code and speech mandate. Therefore, in addition to being a self-expression tool that is problematic, language also has a social function.

### *A. Language as A Tool of Social Integration and Adaptation*

Language in addition to being one of the elements of culture, it allows humans to use their experiences, learn and participate in those experiences, and learn to become acquainted with others. Community members can only be united efficiently through language. Language as a means of communication, further enables each person to feel himself tied to the social group he enters, and can perform all community activities by avoiding as far as possible clashes to obtain the highest possible efficiency. It enables perfect integration (intermingling) for each individual with his community (Gorys Keraf, 1997, p. 5).

The specific mode of language besides functioning as a communication tool also serves as a tool of social integration and adaptation. As we adapt to a particular social environment, we will choose the language we will use depending on the circumstances we face. We will use different languages in different people. We will use non-standard language in our friends' environment and use the standard language in our parents or people we respect. When we learn a foreign language, we also try to learn how to use the language. For example, in what situations would we use a particular word, which word is polite and disrespectful.

### *B. Language as A Tool of Social Control*

As a social control tool, language is very effective. This social control can be applied to ourselves or to society. Various information, information, and education are delivered through the language. Textbooks and instruction books are one example of using language as a means of social control. Religious lectures are examples of the use of language as a means of social control. Furthermore, scientific or political oration is a tool of social control. We also often attend discussions or talk shows on television and radio. Public service or social service ads are one form of language implementation as a means of social control. These are all language activities that give us ways to gain new insights, new

attitudes, good behaviors and actions. In addition, we learn to listen and listen to the views of others about a thing. Examples of language functions as a social control tool that is very easy to apply is as a tool to reduce anger. Writing is one very effective way to relieve our anger. Pour our indignation and anger into writing. Usually, in the end, our anger gradually disappears and we can see the problem more clearly and calmly.

### *C. Verbal Abuse*

In cases of verbal abuse or verbal abuse, words are instruments to harm and intimidate. There is no need for physical violence, but the pressure caused by insult and outbursts also has a very painful effect. However, in contrast to the physical violence that traces visible and vise can be requested to the doctor, verbal violence does not directly leave a visible imprint. It is therefore difficult for verbal abuse recipients to get a medical record as evidence of what happened to them. Verbal abusers generally experience many of their feelings as anger. For instance, if a verbal abuser feels unsure and anxious he may simply feel angry—possibly angry that he is feeling unsure and anxious. Yet part of being human is the ability to feel. The ability to feel, like the ability to think, is universal to humanity. Unfortunately, the abuser is generally unwilling to accept his feelings and unwilling to reveal them to a partner. He builds a wall between himself and his partner and maintains that distance.

In *The Verbal Abusive Relationship*, Patricia Evans identifies a number of categories of verbal abuse. Some are obvious, while others are more subtle. Bentuk-bentuk verbal abuse antara lain: Countering, discounting, accusing and blaming, judging and criticizing, trivializing, threatening, and denial. Countering is a tendency to be argumentative, not merely in political, philosophical, or scientific contexts but in ordinary contexts as well. The victim of the abuse may share her positive feelings about a movie she just saw, and the abuser may then attempt to convince her that her feelings are wrong. This is countering, or dismissing the victim's feelings, thoughts, and experiences on a regular basis.

Discounting is an attempt to deny that the victim of the abuse has any right to his or her thoughts or feelings. It may come out as criticism—but criticism of a particular kind. The abuser may tell the victim on a regular basis that he or she is too sensitive, too childish, has no sense of humor or tends to make a big deal out of nothing. The abuser thereby denies the victim's inner reality, indirectly telling a partner that how they feel and what they experience are wrong. Accusing and blaming. In these forms of abuse the abuser will accuse the victim of things that are outside of his or her control. He or she might accuse a partner of preventing them from getting a promotion because the partner is overweight, or ruining his or her reputation because the partner dropped out of college.

Judging and criticizing is similar to accusing and blaming but also involves a negative evaluation of the partner. As Evans points out, "Most 'you' statements are judgmental, critical, and abusive." Some abusive judging and criticizing "you" statements are: "You are never satisfied"; "You always find something to be upset about"; and "No one likes you because you are so negative." Trivializing is a form of verbal

abuse that makes most things the victim of the abuse does or wants to do seem insignificant. The abuser might undermine his or her work, style of dressing, or choice of food. Threatening is a common form of verbal abuse and can be very explicit, such as, "If you don't start doing what I say, I will leave you." Or it can be more subtle, such as, "If you don't follow my advice, others will find out that you are a very unreliable person. Denial is abusive when it consists of denying one's bad behavior and failing to realize the consequences of this behavior. An abuser will always try to find a way to justify and rationalize his behavior. This is a way of denying that he has done anything wrong.

### III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Verbal abuse in multiracial communication begins with language construction. Examples of racial social construction are related to the Negro definition. Franklin (1967: 11) states that Negroes are something that is social and conventional, not a biological concept. Social definitions and not biological facts actually determine the status of an individual and his position in racial relations. More specifically, Franklin also added that the definition of Negro and colored skin is also different according to British society and its colonies. According to the white race, whoever is not white is black, anyone who is not black is white. Although in fact someone in America who is a mixture of Indians and white blood can be regarded as white or yellow skin. However, for the colonial, mixing between whites and blacks tends to be called *mullato* or hybrid. The same thing is also mentioned by Frantz Fanon (1952) in his *Black Fact*, he underlined that colonialism always represents their dominance and subordination to certain racial groups. Fanon's focus is on observing the ways in which the colonial institutions and ideologies associated with them construct the idea of race through representations of blackness, negro, native and other titles. In addition, Fanon also noticed ways in which colonized view of themselves and their position in colonial society, as well as their struggle against colonialism. Here is a verbal abuse found in Jacqueline Woodson's novels.

#### A. Result

Based on the analysis of data obtained from Jacqueline Woodson novels found seven forms of verbal abuse as follows:

##### 1) *Countering*

To show that they are a superior race, the white race often conter or dismiss the non-white race. Individuals who feel as a majority and dominant group always distinguish themselves from individuals or groups who occupy positions below them.

"None of us is on scholarship, Maizon," Marie continued. I shrugged. "So? What's supposed to mean?" I just don't want anybody in my face telling me what they are and aren't...."I just thought I'd inform you" Marie said. "Don't think all the blacks here are broke" I rolled my eyes at Marie. "My family's not broke. This is an academic scholarship." (Woodson, 1992, p. 44)

The above discourse implies that the white race believes they are a group of possessions, possessing high, rare, and expensive symbolic values and goods that are so unlikely to be realized by blacks like Maizon. White race believes that high symbolic values can be identified for example with classic artwork that can be fully appreciated only by well-educated and rich individuals. Likewise for example very expensive exclusive brands and very elegant styles are distinguishing marks displayed by those who have the power to perform them. The appearance of white pupils above shows that they want to assert that they are superior to Maizon.

##### 2) *Discounting*

Verbal abuse in the form of discounting can be seen in the white perspective of the social relations of the black race community, as seen in the following excerpt of the MBH novel:

"I'm Marie," the taller girl said, looking me up and down in a way that made me feel like I was dressed wrong. I ran my fingers through my hair and said nothing. "And this is Cleo, Marie's boyfriend." Charli smirked, gesturing toward the photographs on the wall. "At least I have a boyfriend to call my own." "You don't have a boyfriend," Sheila teased. "You have a pet." They all laughed and cooed over a few more pictures of Cleo. Then Marie shut the book and turned to me. "I'm a junior," she announced. (Woodson, 1992, p. 41)

In the above discourse also found the existence of verbal abuse. Charli states that Cleo is Marie's girlfriend. This tutorial is revealed while showing a photo of Cleo. The prejudice that appears here is that Marie has a boyfriend. At the same time he also has the prejudice that black people like Maizon do not have a boyfriend. This is reinforced by his saying that Maizon only has pets, as implied in the phrase Charli you do not have a boyfriend, "Sheila teased. "You have a pet. From the quotation it can be concluded that the white race has a racial prejudice against the black race. White racist attitudes in some of the above quotations occur because of the wrong view of physical differences. Biologically the race can evolve due to intermarriage marriages that will reduce the level of difference slowly. But there are certain races who believe that race cannot evolve. They claim that their race is superior in both physical and intellectual terms, the race claims the right to dominate other races, this notion is called racism. For example, the white race believes that the privileges and superiority of the white race must be maintained. Race label and category are sociopolitical aspects, not just biological aspects, where racism is a historical and cultural construction. Socio politically the dominant white category and the marginal black are the unchangeable categories.

##### 3) *Accusing and Blaming*

Individuals in dominant positions also perform verbal discrimination in the form of accusing and blaming, by assuming the forms produced by those below as rubbish, immature and rude. This attitude is evident among the European aristocrats of the twenty-first century who seek to

protect their privileges by assuming the behavior that the bourgeoisie displays as an obscene and uncontrolled behavior. The derisive behavior of the dominant group in JW novels can be seen in the excerpt of the MBH novel below.

Marie looked annoyed. "Maizon, you don't serve yourself when you're passing the food. You let the other person help themselves first. Otherwise, it's rude."

"Oh, kill it, Marie. I don't mind." Sheila took a roll, broke off a piece, and buttered it. (Woodson, 1992, p. 61)

The dialogue in the above takes place in the dining room between the black Maizon figures with some of his white companions. Marie considers that the way Maizon at the table does not fit the rules according to the smug. Therefore he stated that it is not polite. This is reflected in Marie's words "You let the other person help themselves first. Otherwise, it's rude."

The mockery of a predominantly white group of people is concerned not only with black behavior which they find rude, but also often found to be derided against the black physical condition. This phenomenon can be seen in the following excerpt of IYCS novel.

Two couples sat on the couch smiling and looking like they had been there a while. Miah mumbled hellos to them, leaned forward to shake everyone's hand the way he had done since he was there. "Oh, my lord, Norman, this child is beautiful" One of the woman said, an older plump woman with short locks "where'd you adopt him?" Miah smiled but didn't say anything. He knew he looked like his dad but mostly like his mother. (Woodson, 1998: 116)

The above quotation tells of a white visitor visiting Jeremiah's house. The guest was impressed by Jeremiah's valiant appearance even though she was not purely of white parents. His father is black, while his mother is white. Seeing the condition, the visiting guest mocked Jeremiah's father with the words "where'd you adopt him?" The guest implicitly stated that he was not convinced that Jeremiah was the son of a black father, in fact he asked where Norman adopted Jeremiah.

#### 4) Judging

Judging emerges as a result of racial prejudice, a white historical perspective of the ideal human concept to show their power and identity. So it can be said that white prejudice is a supremacy that the white community purposely built as a form of justification of opinion, an opinion formed without a compelling reason or prior to the argument of knowledge. Here are some of the racial prejudices found in the MBH novel.

"While we have small classes with caring teachers and some of the best athletic equipment, we're still working on being more inclusive-bringing in more minorities and students who financially wouldn't be able to have a boarding school experience if it weren't for scholarship". I listened to him drone on

for a while. I hated the word minorities. I mean, who decides who becomes a minority? (Woodson, 1992, p. 3)

The above discourse tells about Mrs. Parson, one of the teachers at The Blue Hill School. He mentioned that the school is a good school because it has a class with a very small number of students, and it also has an attentive teacher, a complete sports equipment, and is very open to students from minority who have financial limitations. It can be seen in the phrase we are still working on being more inclusive - bringing in more minorities and students who are financially would not have a boarding school experience if it were not for scholarship. Mrs. The parson indicates that he has a background assumption or background knowledge of a black minority that encourages him to perform an action or expression. His tutorials show that he considers blacks to be a minority, and they are people with financial limitations. Therefore they have a prejudice that blacks are only able to continue their studies to The Blue Hill if they get a scholarship.

#### 5) Trivializing

In addition, the white race also has the notion that the appearance of blacks is not the same as the standard they rationalize. It is this difference that gives birth to verbal abuse in the form of trivializing. This rationalization is influenced by the opinion of many human anatomy experts who claim that the anatomical human body of various races resembles the type of ape or orangutan. The likeness of the blacks appears in the forward temple shape, large jaws, flat and wide noses. The white resemblance to the Ape type lies in the body's hair and the shape of the lips. In addition, the white race has a larger brain than blacks. These natural traits were used white as an excuse to create a rationalization of racial superiority, and perpetuate the system of slavery against blacks. Anatomically the shape of the body, in general, the white understands that something ideal for the appearance of women is to have a body that is ideal, not too fat, and the skin is not black. The physical appearance of the black race is often degraded in social intercourse, so this can be regarded as a form of denial of the equality of human dignity, for example as seen in the excerpt of the IYCS novel below.

Jeremiah was black. He could feel it. The way the sun pressed down hard and hot on his skin in the summer. Sometimes it felt like he sweated black beads of oil. He felt warm inside his skin, protected. And in Fort Greene, Brooklyn-where everyone seemed to be some shade of black-he felt good walking through the neighborhood. But one step outside. Just one step and some how the weight of his skin seemed to change. It got heavier. (Woodson, 1998, p. 5)

The above quotation is one of the representations of how social construction puts the body of the black race as a bad one. So the black race feel alienated and burdened because of their physical appearance when mingling in the community. It was like that of a black figure named Jeremiah in the above quotation. He claimed that at his birthplace in Brooklyn everybody was just as black. But when he comes out of his

neighborhood, into a white race society, then being a black man is very heavy. As implied in the Jeremiah sentence but one step outside. Just one step and somehow the weight of his skin seems to change. It got heavier. This happens because of their unacceptability due to their black skin in the middle of the white community.

#### 6) *Threatening*

Discrimination also occurs in the form of white society threats against the black community. For example, reflected in Jacqueline Woodson's novels is the avoidance of social interaction. Avoidance and segregation of white society with blacks can be seen in the excerpt of the IYCS novel below:

Once Anne and I were walking through Central Park, when a black guy started running toward us. I frowned, remembering how Anne had screamed, and grabbed me. When the guy got up close, we realized he was a jogger, not a mugger or anything, and Anne had turned red with embarrassment. (Woodson, 1998, p. 69)

The white attitude that avoids blacks is evident from Anne's way above. As she plays with her sister in the park, they see a black teenager running towards them, as seen in the sentence when a black guy started running toward us. Anne becomes hysterical and embraces her brother. This attitude seems to be strongly influenced by their negative prejudices against blacks. They identify the black man with a criminal behavior. In fact it turns out in the above discourse that black teenagers were not mean evil, just joking. But it still made Anne scared and tried to avoid the black teenager.

#### 7) *Denial*

The perspective of the white race on the black race body also gave rise to discriminatory attitudes in the form of white community denials against the black community. For example, reflected in JW novels is the avoidance in social interaction of society. Black race marginalized by white skin through discrimination and racial segregation show some form of resistance that is done individually and collectively. Black racial resistance in Jacqueline Woodson novels can be seen in the following excerpt of the MBH novel:

Personally, I don't consider myself less than anyone. When Mr. Parsons got to the part in his speech about the great founders of Blue Hill, I tuned him out. It was a trick I had. I could make a person disappear just by not listening to him. (Woodson, 1992, p. 3)

The above discourse shows Maizon resistance as a white person against the white society's racism. Maizon's critical attitude can be seen from his disagreement on the concept of majority-minority. He questioned who was entitled to decide which groups were considered the majority and which groups were considered minorities. The resistance of Maizon is also reinforced by the assertion that he considers himself no less than the whites.

#### B. *Discussion*

Based on the overall form of verbal abuse that appears in the Jacqueline Woodson novels it is seen that the most used

form of verbal abuse is accusing and blaming. It indicates that the ideology of racism is more than a system of ideas and beliefs about the superiority of race. The ideology of racism has its material existence in the various practical activities of society, incarnated in the collective way of life of society, governs the pattern of community relations. The white race still holds the principle of white supremacy so that it denigrates the race other than whites.

As a novel published after the era of the Civil Rights Movement of 1964, JW's novels show that in the matter of racial purity, look only at strict restrictions on violations of white purity. JW's novels also show that racism shifts from an exclusive field of racism that closes itself to keeping racial purity into an inclusive racism that opens up to other races, but nonetheless maintains and affirms racial differences.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

From the above analysis it can be concluded that JW novels as a multiracial communication discourse show that verbal abuse influential in shaping patterns of American society's racial relations. Verbal abuse practices based on the ideology of racism still continue. The category of race and all attributes attached to it have expanded over time, from biogenetic categories to non-biogenetic / social categories. The definition of the race category is highly fluctuating, which is consistently only a black and white category. The definition of who is white is strongly influenced by cultural, economic, and political context at certain times and histories.

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