

## Presupposition Analysis in *The Help* Film (2011)

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### ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji penggunaan praanggapan dalam dialog dan naskah film *The Help* (2011) melalui teori praanggapan George Yule. Praanggapan adalah latar belakang asumsi yang dimiliki oleh pembicara dan berperan dalam komunikasi untuk menyampaikan informasi secara tidak langsung. George Yule mengidentifikasi enam jenis praanggapan: eksistensial, faktual, non-faktual, leksikal, struktural, dan kontrafaktual. Film *The Help* berlatar tahun 1960-an di Mississippi selama Gerakan Hak-hak Sipil yang mengeksplorasi hubungan yang kompleks antara pembantu kulit hitam dan majikan kulit putih mereka. Penelitian ini berfokus pada dialog dan naskah dari tiga karakter film yaitu Aibileen Clark, Minny Jackson, dan Eugenia Phelan (Skeeter), untuk menyelidiki bagaimana jenis-jenis praanggapan direpresentasikan dalam dialog dan naskah film. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bagaimana praanggapan berkontribusi dalam memahami informasi secara implisit dengan menggunakan pendekatan pragmatis. Konteks sosial-budaya digunakan untuk memahami cara praanggapan menafsirkan ujaran. Dalam penelitian ini, keenam jenis praanggapan: eksistensial, faktual, leksikal, struktural, non-faktual dan kontrafaktual ditemukan dalam dialog film. Praanggapan struktural adalah jenis yang paling banyak ditemukan, dan praanggapan non-faktif adalah yang paling sedikit ditemukan oleh peneliti. Temuan-temuan tersebut mengungkapkan bahwa praanggapan sangat penting untuk menyampaikan pesan secara implisit, meningkatkan pemahaman peneliti tentang interaksi karakter melalui konteks situasi yang berlangsung dan penokohan Aibileen sebagai karakter utama.

**Kata kunci:** konteks, film, praanggapan, film *The Help*

### ABSTRACT

This research examines the use of presupposition in the dialogue and script of the film *The Help* (2011) through George Yule's presupposition theory. Presuppositions are background assumptions the speaker holds and play a role in communication to indirectly convey information. George Yule identifies six types of presuppositions: existential, factive, lexical, structural, non-factive, and counterfactual. *The Help* film is set in 1960s Mississippi during the Civil Rights Movement and explores the complex relationship between black maids and their white employers. This research focuses on the dialogues and scripts of three film characters, Aibileen Clark, Minny Jackson, and Eugenia Phelan (Skeeter), to investigate how types of presuppositions are represented in the dialogues and scripts. This research shows how presuppositions contribute to understanding implicit information using a pragmatic approach. Socio-cultural contexts are used to understand the way presuppositions interpret utterances. In this study, all six types of presuppositions: existential, factive, lexical, structural, non-factive, and counterfactual, were found in the film's dialogue. Structural presuppositions were the most common type, and non-factive presuppositions were the least found by the researcher. This study shows that presuppositions are essential to convey messages implicitly, enhancing the researcher's understanding of character interactions through the context of the unfolding situation and the characterization of Aibileen as the main character.

**Keywords:** context, film, presupposition, *The Help* film

## A. INTRODUCTION

Communication serves five main functions, namely expressing which is related to ideas or emotions, conveying which is related to information, exploring which is related to thoughts or concepts, persuading others, and providing entertainment (Apriyanto, 2020), furthermore, that the language, the tool for the communication, is also used to express ideas and perspectives (Sapar, 2022). In daily conversations, people usually have background information before they make an utterance. The presupposition is background information owned by the speaker, shared with the listener (Kristy et al., 2020), and stimulates the motivation of having a conversation among speakers (Liang and Liu, 2016). Presupposition also has six types that have different functions. The types of presuppositions are existential, factive, lexical, structural, non-factive, and counterfactual (Yule, 1996). The utilization of presuppositions in daily activities facilitates the indirect acquisition of information the speaker provides. Understanding presupposition through the context of the situation when the conversation was held enables the listener to understand what the speaker meant indirectly. Context, which includes physical, social, and cultural elements, is something related to the audience's mental representation of those aspects that the audience uses in arriving at an interpretation.

The film is one of the literary works that communicates through action, gesture, and dialogue. Some films focus on vividly portraying a unique character through action and dialogue (Boggs and Petrie, 2008). Through the characters' dialogue, the audience can find information related to the story. Characters in films naturally reveal their character through what they say. Their true thoughts, attitudes, and emotions can be expressed subtly through word choice and stress, tone, and pause patterns in speech (Boggs and Petrie, 2008). Therefore, film offers a rich and dynamic medium for research, particularly in investigating how character development and thematic elements are conveyed through dialogue and nonverbal expression. By analyzing these aspects, this study aims to uncover deeper layers of meaning that may not be immediately apparent in other forms of literary works. Consequently, film emerges as an appropriate and valuable research object.

This research examines dialogue from the film *The Help*, released in 2011. *The Help* film tells how different skin colours can affect a person's outlook. The film tells the story of a black maid named Aibileen Clark, who works as a maid at the Leefolt residence. Aibileen, who has long felt oppressed, finally decides to help a story writer named Eugenia Phelan (Skeeter) write a book that tells the situation of black maids. With the help of Aibileen and Minny Jackson, her best friend, they managed to publish the book. This film is fascinating to discuss from a linguistic point of view, with the application of presupposition theory, to examine how the characters exchange information and how presupposition represents characteristics through dialogue, since a significant portion of the characters' communication relies on implied meanings, underlying assumptions, and unspoken social norms—all of which are fundamental to the study of presupposition. In addition, the study of film offers numerous opportunities for new insights, while simultaneously cautioning against an approach to visual documents as “transparent representations to be mined for content” (Gaycken, 2015).

The main purpose of this study is to analyze how the types of presupposition are represented in film dialogue. By emphasising how presupposition is used and the portrayal of characters through presupposition types. Presupposition provides deeper insight into how characters are constructed, evolve, and interact through dialogue.

## **B. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **1. Film**

Bazin in Ren (2024) refers to film as a fusion of art and technology, consistently striving to provide a comprehensive sensory experience for its audience. The film combines visual and narrative elements for expression, evolves through technological advances, and reflects society's values. The film is also viewed as a language that analyses its communication through visuals, sound, and narrative. Like other literary works, films rely on theme, plot, character, setting, and point of view to shape the story and capture the audience's attention.

The main difference between film and other literary works lies in how the story is told and the experience it provides to the viewer or reader. Films use visual and aural elements, such as moving images, lighting, color, sound, and music, to create atmosphere and convey meaning directly (Boggs and Petrie, 2008). Meanwhile, literary works such as novels or poetry rely on written language to describe settings, characters, and events, thus demanding the reader's imagination to form mental images (Magyari, et al., 2020). In addition, films have a more structured time dimension, where the storyline is controlled by duration and editing. Otherwise, in literature, the reader has the freedom to determine the pace of understanding and contemplating the content of the story. Thus, although both share narrative elements such as theme, plot, characters, and point of view, the film relies more on direct sensory experience, while literature emphasizes personal interpretation through words.

### **2. Presupposition**

Presupposition refers to the background information that speakers possess before making an utterance. As defined by Yule (1996), presupposition is an assumption made by the speaker before uttering a statement. Individuals typically make assumptions based on the specific context of a conversation in their daily interactions. For instance, in the sentence “Deni’s book,” the presupposition is that a person named Dani possesses a book. Presupposition is closely associated with the use of a wide range of words, phrases, and structures. Notably, the words or phrases themselves do not carry presuppositions; only the speakers can hold presuppositions. Even when a sentence is negated, the presupposition remains stated as true. Yule describes this phenomenon as constancy under negation. Similarly, Finch posits that presupposition pertains to the necessary preconditions for statements to be considered true.

Pragmatic presupposition encompasses the underlying assumptions that facilitate effective communication, thereby enhancing the audience’s comprehension of character dialogues and interactions (Sukmawati, 2020). It is the assumption made by the speaker before uttering a statement. In Yule’s theory, employing the symbol “>” to denote “presuppose” aids in analyzing data that may contain potential presuppositions. Furthermore, Rosdiana (2016) contends that interpreting poems can be challenging without prior schemata in the reader’s mind, suggesting that understanding messages in literary works necessitates background context, including presuppositions.

### **3. Types of presuppositions**

In the analysis of how speaker assumptions are typically expressed, presupposition has been associated with the use of a large number of words, phrases, and structures. These linguistic

forms are considered indicators of potential presupposition, which can only become actual presupposition in context with the speaker (Yule, 1996). Therefore, Yule identifies six types of presuppositions: the existential, the factive, the non-factive, the lexical, the structural, and the counterfactual. Below are further explanations of the six types of presuppositions:

**a. Existential presupposition**

The existential presupposition is the presupposition that the speaker names specific things, which are implied to exist and be present in the noun phrase. The indicator of existential presupposition is a definite or indefinite noun phrase such as 'the, a, an. And also in the form of possessive constructions such as 'his, hers, my, our, their...' are also the other indicators of existential presupposition (Yule, 1996).

Example: The King of Sweden >> it can be presupposed that someone who rules Sweden entitled as 'King' exists.

**b. Factive presupposition**

Factive presupposition is the type of presupposition that used some words in the sentences to denote facts. According to George Yule, the indicator of factive presupposition consists of several factive verbs such as 'be aware, realize, know, prove, glad, odd, be sorry, regret, appreciate, make sense, amuse, bear in mind' (Yule, 1996).

Example: She didn't realize he was ill >> it can be presupposed that he was ill.

**c. Lexical presupposition**

Lexical presupposition occurs when the use of a particular word or phrase implies a certain assumption that must be true for the sentence to make sense. This type of presupposition arises from specific lexical items that inherently carry an implicit meaning. There are forms which may be treated as the indicator of lexical presupposition, such as manage, stop, and start (Yule, 1996).

Example: He stopped smoking >> it can be presupposed that he used to smoke.

**d. Structural presupposition**

Structural presupposition refers to a presupposition associated with the use of specific words and phrases. In this context, certain sentence structures have been systematically analyzed as conventionally and regularly presupposing the existence of an assumed truth within that structure. In English, the construction of wh-questions is conventionally interpreted with the presupposition that the information following the wh-question form is already assumed to be true. (Yule, 1996).

Example: When did he leave? >> it can be presupposed he left.

**e. Non-factive presupposition**

A non-factive presupposition is an assumption that is not taken to be true. Yule (1996) noted that verbs such as "dream," "imagine," and "pretend" are typically employed with this presupposition, indicating that the subsequent statements are not to be regarded as factual.

Example: We imagined we were in Hawaii >> it can be presupposed we were not in Hawaii.

**f. Counterfactual presupposition**

Counterfactual presupposition is the assumption that what is presupposed is not only untrue

but is the opposite of what is true or contrary to facts. The use of if-conditional sentences presupposes that the information is not true or contrary to fact (Yule, 1996).

Example: If you were my friend, you would have helped me >> it can be presupposed you are not my friend.

#### **4. Context**

Context is the condition in which communication occurs, playing a crucial role in interpreting meaning. Levinson (1983) views context as an active element that interacts with language to create meaning, emphasizing that shared context helps infer unstated information. Physical context includes tangible surroundings like location and time, influencing how utterances are understood. Situational context refers to the immediate environment affecting meaning, such as identifying referents in deixis (Levinson, 1983). The meaning of grammatical utterances from the speaker cannot be understood easily without knowing the context of the situation, as context influences meaning (Nisa, et al., 2023). Presuppositions refer to the statements made by a speaker or writer that assume the audience already possesses knowledge or awareness of a particular subject. (Yule, 2017).

### **C. METHOD**

This study analyzes *The Help* film using a qualitative method to examine dialogue, character interactions, and settings. Qualitative research collects descriptive data from words and actions (Taylor et al., 2015). Based on the research method, the researcher serves as the main research instrument to classify and describe presuppositions in the film. The researcher applies George Yule's pragmatic approach to classify the types of presuppositions and uses context for further analysis. In addition, the researcher used the taking note method to record fragments from the dialogue and narration that can be used as data through the transcript and the film. Note-takers take notes to record information or to aid reflection. The major aims of note are to build up a stable external memory in a form that can be used later (Boch and Piolat, 2008). The study focuses on dialogues from Aibileen Clark, Minny Jackson, and Eugenia Phelan (Skeeter) from *The Help* film (2011), which is available on Disney+, and its script from [dailyscript.com](http://dailyscript.com). The researcher examines how these presuppositions shape character development by applying film theory from Boggs and Petrie.

### **D. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

In this chapter, the researcher presents the findings of the research. After analyzing the film's dialogue, the researcher found the types of presuppositions represented in *The Help* film's dialogue. Hence, the findings are presented below.

#### **1. Findings**

After analyzing the data, the researcher found data that potentially had presuppositions from the dialogues of the characters Aibileen Clark, Minny Jackson, and Eugenia Phelan in *The Help* film (2011). The data that has been found has been arranged into each type of presupposition

according to George Yule's theory. The researcher also used the context of the situation to analyze the data and divided it into six types of presuppositions: existential, factive, lexical, structural, non-factive, and counterfactual.

### a. Existential presupposition

Existential presupposition is an assumption about the existence of an entity or event. The existential presuppositions presented in this study are dialogues that contain indicators in the form of definite descriptions and possessive constructions.

The following example is a dialogue that contains an indicator in the form of the possessive construction 'Her':

#### Data 02

Minnie : Here's *your pocketbook*. Oh, okay. Let me get the pie. Hold on, Missus Walters. Hold on.  
(06:46 – 06:53)

In data 02 above, the word "*your*" in Minny's dialogue indicates existential presuppositions in the form of possessive construction. In the context of the situation, Minny gave Missus Walters a pocketbook, which is her employer's mother. This indicates that the pocketbook given by Minny exists, and the pocketbook belongs to Missus Walters.

The following example is a dialogue that contains an indicator in the form of a definite description 'The':

#### Data 04

Aibileen : Hold on! Those are Miss Hilly's.  
Minnie : She looks like the winning horse at *the Kentucky Derby*. All them flowers and bows.  
(10:00 – 10:09)

In data 04 above, the word "*the*" is a definite description that indicates the type of existential presuppositions that appear in Minny's dialogue. Based on the context of the situation, Minny knows a horse race called the Kentucky Derby and considers Miss Hilly's appearance as one of the horses that won the contest. The word "the" triggers the Kentucky Derby to be known as a reality, and data 6 can be classified into the existential presuppositions type.

### b. Factive presupposition

The factive presupposition is a type of presupposition in which information is considered true. In Yule's presupposition theory, words like 'know', 'be', 'aware', 'odd', and 'glad' indicate factive presupposition.

The following is an example of a dialogue from film *The Help* that contains an indicator of factive presupposition:

### Data 26

Skeeter : I *know* now that it's against *the law* what we're doin'.  
(09:12 – 09:16)

In data 26 above, Skeeter knows that the interviews she will conduct to write a book from the perspective of black maids will be against the law. The word “*know*” indicates that the presupposition Skeeter has when she utters the utterance is a fact. Based on the context of the situation in the era in which the film is set, there were laws restricting the interaction of black and white people. In addition to the indicator of factive presupposition, the word ‘the’, which is an indicator of the existential presupposition, also appears in the dialogue to indicate that the law they are talking about is something that exists.

### c. Lexical presupposition

According to Yule (2017), lexical presupposition refers to the background assumptions or information implied by the use of a particular word or expression and taken for granted by speakers and listeners in a particular context. Some words are indicators of this lexical presupposition, such as ‘succeed’, ‘stop’, ‘start’, and ‘again’.

The following are some data taken from the dialogue and script of *The Help* film that contain lexical presuppositions and their explanations:

### Data 09

Hilly : He got held up on the oil rig, Skeeter. It's offshore.  
Skeeter : Well, I'm *starting* to think this Stuart is a figment of your imagination.  
So, just forget it. I'm gonna go get a plate.  
(11:45 – 11:58)

In the data above, the word “*starting*” appears in Skeeter and Hilly's dialogue; Skeeter presupposed that Stuart is a real person. Based on the context of the situation, Skeeter previously thought that the person named Stuart was a real person because Stuart often canceled their dinner appointments for various reasons. Skeeter began to think that Stuart was just Hilly's imagination.

### d. Structural presupposition

According to Yule (1996), structural presuppositions refer to presuppositions that arise due to a sentence's syntactic structure. The grammatical construction itself triggers these presuppositions. In this instance, certain sentence structures have been systematically analyzed and consistently examined, presupposing that a portion of the structure is already presumed to be accurate. The WH-question construction, such as 'what', 'why', 'who', 'where', 'when', and 'how' are the indicators of structural presuppositions.

The following dialogue is an example of a dialogue that contains data from structural presuppositions:

### Data 24

- Minnie : She's done told every white lady in town I'm a thief. Said I stole a candelabra. Oh, I got her back.  
Aibileen : *What* you did?!

(38:09 – 38:21)

In data 24 above, Aibileen presupposes that Minny has done something to her ex-employer. The word “*what*” indicates that Aibileen already knows that Minny has done something that might harm her. In the story, Minny is portrayed as someone brave, so Aibileen knows that Minny must have done something, especially after hearing Minny say, ‘**Oh, I got her back.**’ It makes Aibileen even more convinced and worried that something terrible will happen to Minny.

### e. Non-factive presupposition

Non-factive presuppositions are those in which the speaker implies a condition or context that is not true. According to Yule (2017), verbs such as ‘dream,’ ‘imagine,’ and ‘pretend’ are used with the presupposition that what follows is not true.

The following below is an example of a dialogue that contains data from non-factive presuppositions:

### Data 39

- Skeeter : No. I want to show her perspective...so people might understand what it's like from your side.  
Minnie : Well it's a real Fourth of July picnic. It's what we *dream* a doing all weekend long, get back in they house to polish the silver. And we just love not makin' minimum wage or gettin' Social Security.

(57:53 – 58:15)

In data 39 above, “*dream*” is one indicator that shows this data can be classified into the non-factive presupposition type. In the context of the situation, the word “*dream*” in Minny's dialogue describes how they want a wonderful holiday without thinking about other things like polishing silver and other chores. However, in reality, they do not even have a proper holiday schedule. They often spend their weekends finishing their other work without being able to rest appropriately. Due to the research limitation, the researcher only found one piece of data for this non-factive presupposition.

### f. Counterfactual presupposition

Counterfactual presuppositions are one of the rare types of presuppositions found in the data of this study. Counterfactual presuppositions refer to situations that presuppose circumstances or events that are contrary to reality. They assume information that should have happened under alternative conditions and the use of if-clauses. Counterfactual presuppositions are a way of talking about possibilities that did not materialise and are often used to express speculation or regret in conversation.

The following is an example of a dialogue that contains data from counterfactual presuppositions:

**Data 57**

- Minnie : So Miss Hilly thought you knew 'bout "The Terrible Awful"—that you were making fun of her. It's my fault she pounced on you. *If you leave Mister Johnny, then Miss Hilly done won the whole ball game.* Then she done beaten me, and she done beat you...
- Celia : Thank you for telling me that.

(01:47:26 – 01:48:05)

In data 57 above, the word “*If*”, the indicator of counterfactual presuppositions, appears in the dialogue by Minny. In the context of the situation, when the dialogue utterance, Minny presupposes that Miss Celia is still married to Mister Johnny, Miss Celia's husband. The word “*if*” that appears in Minny's dialogue can be classified as counterfactual presuppositions because, in the context of the situation, when the situation where Miss Celia divorces Mister Johnny, then Miss Hilly will win the game as assumed by Minny. However, in reality, Miss Celia did not divorce Mister Johnny, and Miss Hilly did not win the game as Minny assumed she would. Therefore, Minny's dialogue can be categorized as counterfactual presuppositions because it contradicts the facts.

## 2. Discussion

In this section, the researcher discusses the findings that contain types of presuppositions based on George Yule's theory. The data taken from the dialogue and script of *The Help* Film (2011) focuses on the three main characters, Aibileen Clark, Minny Jackson, and Eugenia Phelan (Skeeter). After examining all the dialogues and scripts of Aibileen Clark, Minny Jackson, and Eugenia Phelan (Skeeter) in film *The Help*, the researcher found all the types of presuppositions based on George Yule's theory. Presuppositions are background information shared by the speaker that helps convey the information in the film indirectly and helps the audience understand the speaker's information. From the whole research, the researcher concluded that the types of presuppositions are represented in the dialogues and scripts of Aibileen Clark, Minny Jackson, and Eugenia Phelan (Skeeter), with a total of seventy data points containing presuppositions. All types of presuppositions are represented in their dialogues, with structural presupposition being the most common type of presupposition found by the researcher.

By looking at the context of the situation during the dialogue, the researcher also realised that character development is reflected in the presupposition types. During the film's story development, Aibileen's character develops from being cautious and afraid. Aibileen established the confidence to voice her thoughts and resist the discrimination that she endured. Aibileen shows her caution through her dialogue, “*What* if you don't like what I'm about to say?” Aibileen's dialogue contains structural presupposition indicators where WH-question becomes the indicator. As the story progresses, Aibileen finally dares to stand up to Hilly, who continues to humiliate and abuse the black servants. Aibileen says, “I *know* something about you. Don't you forget that.”, with the word 'know' being an indicator of the type of factive presupposition and the situation in the story where Aibileen knows the secret of Hilly, who desperately wants

to hide it, is a fact. Knowing Hilly's secret makes Aibileen more courageous in fighting against the oppression she receives. Aibileen's character development is portrayed through her dialogue that dares to fight Hilly, who is considered the head of the socialite of white socialites. Moreover, the plot and conflict grow with the development of Aibileen's character.

Presupposition, as the background assumption owned by the speaker, can be used in researching various literary works, especially films that use dialogue to convey the story. It is not limited to dialogue only; presupposition can also describe how film elements such as character development and plot are conveyed. A lot of indirect information from the film can be found through presupposition.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

After conducting research by using George Yule's theory of presupposition, the researcher concluded that the types of presuppositions: existential, factive, lexical, structural, non-factive, and counterfactual are represented through the dialogues of Aibileen Clark, Minny Jackson, and Eugenia Phelan (Skeeter) to provide information to the audience. Some of the information that can be taken from the implied dialogue can be known by examining the presuppositions in the dialogue. In this study, the types of presuppositions also describe how Aibileen's character develops from a cautious and fearful character to a character who is brave enough to voice her rights. Through presupposition, the researcher can find the information presented in the dialogue directly or indirectly.

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