
The Situated Meaning of Abraham Lincoln's Speech on Lincoln Movie

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Abstract

This study was conducted to analyze the situated meaning of Lincoln's speech on Lincoln movie. The writer used qualitative method to conduct the research. The data were collected and transcribed from Lincoln movie. The writer used Gee's situated meaning theory to know what the situated meaning of Lincoln's speech that the movie tried to enact with the help of seven building tasks. The results of the situated meaning conveyed by the movie were the characteristics of an ideal president, equality, and building nationalism. The writer found that the Significance building tool on the movie brought the idea of Lincoln's success to pass the 13th amendment to abolish slavery as the cure of the Civil War. Lincoln was pictured as an ideal president who build nationalism feeling to the people surround him. On Activities building tool, the movie showed that Lincoln's activity on telling stories was his attempt to spread out his ideology of equality to the people surround him. Later, Identities building tool portrayed Lincoln as an ideal president who could maintain different identities for different context. Next, Relationships building tool showed Lincoln as an ideal president who could sustain good relationship with the people surrounds him. Moreover, Politics building tool supported Lincoln on distributing the social goods of equality and building nationalism. Next, Connections building tool defined Lincoln as an ideal president for his ability on connecting two things and making them relevant. The last, Sign Systems and Knowledge building tool described Lincoln as an ideal president who masters the right choice of words.

Keywords: Lincoln, movie, seven building tasks, situated meaning, speech

Introduction

Lincoln's endeavor is recognized as the gateway bringing the Negro out of the slavery until the vote and presidential election. These issues are brought up with the existence of Lincoln as the main character of the movie who is known as a pioneer of the equality for Negro to white men and slavery abolishment under the law. These remarkable achievements encourage the movie maker (producer, director) to release this movie in 2012 in the middle of US economic instability and presidential election which put Obama as one of the candidates to extent his presidential period once more time. Obama is recognized as unsuccessful in running his governmental period (2009 - 2013). The issues within the society can't be solved, the jobless are everywhere, and tax problem could not be resolved. This movie may aim to remind and criticize Obama's work in order to make it better by remembering the former president. It also may supports Obama on his presidential election by ordering the citizen to vote him by setting aside his failure since the freedom of Negro is hard to come by. (Marger, 2008). Moreover, it may strengthen the sense of togetherness to uphold the country stability. This paper describes and explains the situated meaning conveyed on Lincoln's speech by using Gee's theory as the salient theory.

Lincoln is a 2012 movie produced by Steven Spielberg as one of Hollywood movie adapted from the biography *Team of Rivals* written by Doris Kearns Goodwin and performed by Daniel Day-Lewis as 16th United States President, Abraham Lincoln. This movie depicts the last four months of Lincoln's presidency who fight to end the Civil War victory, unite the country and abolish slavery.

In everyday life, people rarely use general meaning in everyday conversation. People use specific word for particular context of use – material setting, the people present (and what they know and believe), the language that comes before and after a given utterance, the social relationships of the people involved, and their ethnic, gendered, and sexual identities, as well as cultural, historical, and institutional factors – to achieve their purpose. Gee (2011, p. 152) states that 'in actual situations of

use, words and structures take on much more specific meanings within the range (or, at least, related to the range of) their meaning potentials'. This is what Gee called as "situated meaning".

There have been several researches on movie discourse, Nancy Fox (2011) had conducted "*A Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis of 'The Kids Are All Right'*". She researches a movie about lesbian couple with two kids which attempts to answer the question of what will be 'normalized' by the same-sex marriage. She conducts the research by using the theory of Kress and Leeuwen (2001) and Gee (2005). Although Nancy uses Gee's theory, she fails to consider Gee's theory as the salient theory. Moreover, she conducts the research on gender topic which is different from the topic chosen by the writer.

Next, Abdul Ghoni (2012) had conducted "*Situated Meaning in the Speech of Makdit Character in the Series of Islam KTP*" by using James Paul Gee's theory. His object of the research is an Indonesian TV series on humor and drama genre under religious topic. Despite Ghoni and the writer use the same theory, the topics are different. The writer conducts the research on biography, history, and drama genre under political topic. Furthermore, Ghoni disregard international issue as the object of the research.

The last, Yusuf Chamo (2012) has conducted "*The Language of Hausa Films: Forging a New Discourse*". He uses discourse to analyze the language used in Hausa films focusing on communication strategy. Yusuf's research deals with communication strategy - proverbs, imperatives, and forms of address -, which is different from the writer that focus on situated meaning. Yusuf's research is incomplete since he doesn't involve the multimodality aspect beside the text.

Methodology: the idea beyond speech and context.

People do have intention on their saying. This belief underlies this thesis topic selection. Movie is not only the form of entertainment but also the medium of people to communicate their idea. The existence of modality such as image, sound, and music support the context which influence the analysis of the conversation in the movie. Gee (2011) explains the combination of images, words, and other modalities (such as music and sound) to create multimodal texts which meant to communicate.

Gee's theoretical model applies seven building tasks to support his theoretical tools including situated meaning. These seven building tasks consist of Significance, Activities, Identities, Relationships, Politics, and Sign Systems and Knowledge. On everyday conversation, unconsciously they engage on several even all of the seven building tasks mentioned as Gee's theoretical model. People build different identities, relationships, and politics in every different context they are involved in. Gee (2011, p. 132) mentions that people perform several or all of the seven building tasks at once when they speak or write. The analysis of these seven building tasks is important to take a deep analysis headed for situated meaning as the salient theory of the study. In addition, the writer provides slavery and class division theory as the supporting material in order to get better understanding and analysis of the study. Elkins in Marger (2008) said that in America between master and slave was operated a system of paternalistic domination, resembling, a parent - child relationship. Marger (2008) explains that on the division of the society, one element of the society owns the basic resources, while the others can only offer their labor to obtain their material needs.

The aim of the research is to find the situated meaning of Lincoln's speech as the main character that tries to be enacted in the movie. Moreover, the aim of this research is to observe how Lincoln's speech fit the situated meaning. Therefore, the using of the methodology to acquire those purposes is by conducting deep analysis toward the research object rather than using variables, statistics, or scales. The data of the study are taken from *Lincoln* movie. The steps to analyze the data are transcribing the movie by using Gee's transcribing method on Stanza model. Later on, the writer analyzes the data by using Gee's seven building tasks and situated meaning.

Seven building task on Lincoln's speech.

Lincoln's speech on Lincoln movie carries out seven building tasks of Gee's theory. Sequentially from the first, significance to the last, sign systems and knowledge. The significance of the movie is Lincoln's success to pass the 13th amendment to abolish slavery as the cure of the Civil War. Lincoln had to get two third of the states' representatives votes to pass the 13th amendment on the House of Representatives. The total of the representatives was 182, so that Lincoln needed 122 votes to achieve the two third of the majority. Despite all Republicans consent for the vote, Lincoln still needed 20 yesses from Democrats to gain 122 votes. It was not easy to collect twenty votes from Democrats since that time was the time of campaign for the next presidential election. The sample conversation for this building tool is when Lincoln decided to give twenty seats on his second term cabinet to Democrats who will give him their votes. "L" is for Lincoln and "S" is for Seward.

STANZA 1

L: Since the house last voted on the amendment there's been an election/ and sixty-four democrats lost their house seats in november that's/ sixty-four democrats looking for work comes march//

S: I know//

L: They don't need to worry about re-election they can vote however it suits 'em//

S: But we can't uh: //

[Knocks on door]

S: BUY the vote for the amendment/ it's too important.//

[There's a knock at the office door and Hay goes to open the door]

L: I said nothing of buYING anything/we need twenty votes was all I said/ start of my second term/ plenty of positions to fill//

Activities building task also appears in this movie. Gee (2011) defines activities as "socially recognized and institutionally or culturally supported endeavor that usually involves sequencing or combining actions in certain specified ways." (Gee, 2011, p. 89). The activity which occurs in this movie is Lincoln activities to tell a story to the people around him. He tells the story not only for entertaining them, but also give a meaning upon the story regarding the social value, culture, significance, and norms in order to support him to pass the 13th amendment. The sample for this is when Lincoln tells a story to two telegram operators about Euclid's proofs about equality. "L" is for Lincoln, "D" for David and "B" for Beckwith.

STANZA 1

L: You're an engineer/ you must know euclid's axioms and common notions//

D: I must've in school: / but uh: /

L: I never had much of schoolin' but I read euclid in an old book I borrowed/ little enough ever found its way in here

[Pointing to his head]

But: once learnt it stayed learnt (.) euclid's first common notion is this/ 'things which are equal to the same thing are equal/ to each other'/ that's a rule of mathematical reasoning it's true because it works/ has done and always will do (.) in his book/hm: euclid says this is 'self-evident'/ d'you see? There it is even in that two thousand year old book of mechanical law: it is a SELF-EVIDENT truth that things which are equal to the same thing/ are equal to each other/ we begin with equality/ that's the origin isn't it? that balance that's/ that's fairness (.) that's justice (.)

[Bates and Beckwith watch Lincoln]

Lincoln performs a lot of identities on Lincoln movie in order to describe him as an ideal president who can balance his job and family. "One way we enact an identity in language is to portray other people and their identities in certain ways that compare or contrast with the identity we want to enact (Gee: 2011, p.109)". He becomes a president, husband, father, friend, and the other identities based on the context. Every identity built by Lincoln is to support his identity as an ideal figure of a president. The example is when Lincoln talks to Ashley to find him the remaining votes; Lincoln performs his identity as a president. He uses his power to ask his people to get him the votes. Even

he presents himself as the President of the United States, so that they should obey his will. “A” is for Ashley, “S” for Seward and “L” for Lincoln.

STANZA 1

S: We need two yeses/ three abstentions/or (.) four yeses and/and one more abstention and the amendment will pass//

L: You got a night and a day and a night and several perfectly good hours, now get the HELL OUT OF HERE and get ‘em!//

A: Yes/ but how? //

L: Buzzards’ guts man/

[Lincoln stands]

I am the president/ of the united states of america/ CLOTHED IN IMMENSE POWER! / you will procure me these votes.//

The next task is relationship building task. On this task, Lincoln creates different relationship to different person. He builds relationship as father and son, husband and wife, president and secretary, and the other relationships to support himself as an ideal president who wise to differentiate the best language to choose depends on the context as US representation. Lincoln treats person differently based on different relation he created with. "In turn, we relate to other people in terms of different identities we take them to have." (Gee, 2011, p. 114). Relationship building task cannot be separated from identities building task since they work together. Example is when he talks to Mr. and Mrs. Jolly he defines the relationship between him and Seward as president and secretary. “L” is for Lincoln.

STANZA 1

L: Mr. jolly/ ma:am/ this here by the fire is secretary of state seward/

[Seward nods]

Jeff city (.) I heard tell once of the: jefferson city lawyer/ who had a parrot that’d wake him each morning/ crying out ‘Today is the day the world shall end as scripture has foretold.’

[Clicking his tongue]

And uh: one day: the lawyer SHOT him/ for the sake of peace and quiet I presume/ thus fulfilling for the bird at least his prophecy//

[Lincoln smiles, but the Jollies look at Lincoln with blank faces, not getting it, Seward gestures for Jolly to speak]

Lincoln distributes politic to the people around him. Politic here is “any situation where the distribution of social goods is at stake” (Gee, 2011, p. 118). Social goods are any social group or society which takes as a good worth having. On *Lincoln* movie, Lincoln distributes the political belief that every people are created equal in order to support him passing Thirteenth Amendment. On some of his speeches, Lincoln implicitly or explicitly delivers his political belief of equality. He uses different manner to distribute his political belief based on the context he involved in. As when he had a conversation with a telegram operator, he said, “Euclid’s first common notion is this: *“Things which are equal to the same thing are equal to each other”*”. This is the way explicitly he delivers his political belief of liberating the slaves. Gee defines face needs on this building tool ‘negative face needs’, when people want their privacy to be respected and they do not want others to impose on them, and ‘positive face needs’, when people want to belong and to be involved, and thus do not want people to leave them out (Gee, 2011, p. 119). On this movie, Lincoln performs more on positive face needs since he needs his people support to pass the Thirteenth Amendment to abolish slavery. He clearly said his needs to belong and do not want people to leave them out on his utterance, “*and I’d like you to stand behind me/ like my: cabinet’s most always done (.)*” as the expression of wanting to be supported and do not want to be left.

Lincoln movie connects several different ideas. “We use language to connect or disconnect things and to make things relevant to each other or not.” (Gee, 2011, p. 126). The connections appear to this movie are the connection of 13th amendment and Civil War, also the connection of status and power. Those connections are made to procure him Thirteenth Amendment. The connections made by Lincoln on his speech are the connection of 13th amendment and Civil War and the connection of his status as a president and the power occurred of his status. As the sample when he has a meeting with

his cabinet people. In the middle of the chaos his people doubt to pass the Thirteenth Amendment for the coming commissioners, Lincoln a little bit angry delivering his speech. "L" is for Lincoln.

STANZA 1

[Suddenly Lincoln smacks the table hard with his hand]

L: I can't listen to this anymore/ I can't accomplish a goddamned thing of any human meaning or worth until we cure ourselves of slavery/ AND END THIS PESTILENTIAL WAR (.) and whether any of you or ANYONE ELSE knows it I know I need THIS

[He smacks the table again]

This amendment IS: THAT CURE (.) we're stepped out upon the world's stage now/ NOW! with the FATE OF HUMAN DIGNITY IN OUR HANDS! BLOOD'S BEEN SPILT TO AFFORD US THIS MOMENT/

[He points around the table at Ashley, Montgomery and Blair]

NOW NOW NOW! but you grousle and HECKLE AND DODGE ABOUT LIKE/ PETTIFOGGING TAMMANY HALL HUCKSTERS (.) see what is before you/ see: the here and now/ that's the hardest thing/ the only thing that accounts (.) abolishing slavery by constitutional provision settles the fate for all: coming: TIME (.) not only of the millions now in bondage (.) but of unborn: millions to come/ two votes stand in its way/ and these votes must be procured//

Lincoln is good on using sign systems and knowledge to accomplish his purposes. He knows the mastery of sign systems and knowledge is needed to strengthen his identity as a US ideal president and obtain his aim to pass Thirteenth Amendment. "Different sign systems represent different views of knowledge and belief, different ways of knowing the world." (Gee, 2011, p. 136). Therefore he applies his knowledge implicitly to describe his aim. The example is when Lincoln talks to Seward about Seward's protest regarding the coming of South commissioners. Seward believes the coming of the commissioners could ruin all the efforts which have been taken for passing the Thirteenth Amendment. However, Lincoln says that he could not choose Thirteenth Amendment or South commissioners. He should pick any possibility to end the Civil War. "S" is for Seward and "L" is for Lincoln.

STANZA 1

L: "If you can look into the seeds of time/ and say which grain will grow: and which will not/ speak then to me"//

S: Oh disaster/ this is a disaster//

L: Time is a great thickener of things/ willum/ yes/ I suppose it is//

S: Actually I have no idea what you mean by that//

[Lincoln stands]

L: Get me thirteen votes/ them fellers from richmond ain't here yit//

Lincoln's situated meaning.

General meanings (dictionary based) sometime are used on some circumstances, though people use specific meaning on several specific contexts. Addressee has to guess what the speaker means when they are engaged in a specific context of discussion. The speaker should try to make sure that he delivers the right things that are understood by the addressee. Therefore, the basic knowledge between the speaker and the addressee is required the same. Unless, there will be misunderstanding between the speaker and the addressee. This concept is also applied in the movie. The movie maker (director, producer) want to deliver their message to the viewer(s) that they have to make sure the viewers would not perceive differently as they mean. The writer presumes *Lincoln* movie general idea is to portray the character of Abraham Lincoln as a president who remains lovable through his distinctive move of liberating slavery. He is portrayed as a kind, assertive, humble, and firm man.

The first message conveyed by the movie is the characteristics of an ideal president. This situated meaning is supported by Gee's Significance, Connections, Activities, Politics, Sign Systems and Knowledge, Identities and Relationships building tasks. The film shows that a president should love his family. No matter what happen with the country and though he was on a very stressful condition, a president should show his devotion to his family since besides leading the country, a president is a leader of his family. Next, a president should be humble. In the movie, Lincoln represented as a humble president. As the sample, he comes to the hospital to see injured soldiers. Next, he talks to

Mrs. Kekley and listen to her carefully though she is only a maid. Also, he stops by to the skulked men provided by Seward. Additionally, a president of the United States should be persistence as portrayed on Lincoln character. In the movie, Lincoln tries to pass the amendment even though the people of his cabinet resist him on passing the amendment. He believed that slavery is miserable for the slave, while God created men equal, no one is superior to the others and every man are the same before the law. A president of United States also should be firm to the things he believes in as the truth that will bring betterment to the society as portrayed by Lincoln on this movie. Though everybody, even his wife on the first time refused to support him to pass the amendment. Lincoln insists to give his best effort to pass the amendment. Though in the middle of the struggle he was shaken by the choice to make peace with the South with the arrival of the peace commissioners, he keeps on his stance that he was not talk peace to the peace commissioners and kept on finding the votes to pass the Amendment. The other sample of his firmness is that he approved Robert's enlistment to join the United Army. He was wise to put his identity as a president and approved Robert's request for every boy in the country were dead to save their beloved nations and show their loyalty. This persistence and assertiveness give example especially to the American people and to the world that every persistence and assertiveness will lead people to success. These all characteristics are depicted in the movie as the characteristics of an ideal president supposed to be. The example of this situated meaning is when Lincoln had a meeting with his cabinet people. His cabinet people believe that they do not need to pass Thirteenth Amendment since the peace commissioners from the South already come. "L" is for Lincoln.

STANZA 1

[Suddenly Lincoln smacks the table hard with his hand]

L: I can't listen to this anymore/ I can't accomplish a goddamned thing of any human meaning or worth until we cure ourselves of slavery/ AND END THIS PESTILENTIAL WAR (.) and whether any of you or ANYONE ELSE knows it I know I need THIS

[He smacks the table again]

This amendment IS: THAT CURE (.) we're stepped out upon the world's stage now/ NOW! with the FATE OF HUMAN DIGNITY IN OUR HANDS! BLOOD'S BEEN SPILT TO AFFORD US THIS MOMENT/

[He points around the table at Ashley, Montgomery and Blair]

NOW NOW NOW! but you grousle and HECKLE AND DODGE ABOUT LIKE/ PETTIFOGGING TAMMANY HALL HUCKSTERS (.) see what is before you/ see: the here and now/ that's the hardest thing/ the only thing that accounts (.) abolishing slavery by constitutional provision settles the fate for all: coming: TIME (.) not only of the millions now in bondage (.) but of unborn: millions to come/ two votes stand in its way/ and these votes must be procured//

On the conversation above, Lincoln show his persistence and assertiveness that he will not make peace with the South commissioners and forces his cabinet people to pass the Thirteenth Amendment.

The second message is about equality. Lincoln on all of his speeches on this movie portrays his political view of equality to all human. He believes that God created all human equal. There is no superiority one to another or white men to black men. He brings this believe in every of his attitude. This message is supported by Gee's Significance, Connections, Activities, Politics, Sign Systems and Knowledge, Identities and Relationships building tasks which explain how Lincoln's speech could fit this situated meaning. As a president of United States who has a power to fulfill his oath for uniting the country, he could impose his ideology to his cabinet people to abolish slavery by asking them to support him on passing Thirteenth Amendment. The example of this situated meaning is when Lincoln talked to the telegraph operators. He told them a story of Euclid's proofs about equality. "L" is for Lincoln, "D" for David and "B" for Beckwith.

STANZA 1

L: You're an engineer/ you must know euclid's axioms and common notions//

D: I must've in school: / but uh: /

L: I never had much of schoolin' but I read euclid in an old book I borrowed/ little enough ever found its way in here

[Pointing to his head]

But: once learnt it stayed learnt (.) euclid's first common notion is this/ 'things which are equal to the same thing are equal/ to each other'/ that's a rule of mathematical reasoning it's true because it works/ has done and always will do (.) in his book/hm: euclid says this is 'self-evident'/ d'you see? there it is even in that two thousand year old book of mechanical law: it is a SELF-EVIDENT truth that things which are equal to the same thing/ are equal to each other/ we begin with equality/ that's the origin isn't it? that balance that's/ that's fairness (.) that's justice (.)

[Bates and Beckwith watch Lincoln]

On this conversation, Lincoln delivers his ideology about equality through a relaxed situation by telling the telegraph operators a story.

The third message is building nationalism which is supported by all of Gee's seven building tasks. The movie shows that the abolition of slavery and unification of the country are not an easy matter. The struggling of Lincoln to abolish the slavery for the Negro was hard to come by. The efforts to end the Civil War were covered by blood. Hence, the people of United States should keep up the unity of the country and should keep good tolerance each other that will not ignite Negro discrimination as a slave once more time. The example is when Lincoln had a conversation with Stephens, the South commissioner. "L" is for Lincoln, "S" is for Stephens.

STANZA 1

S: How've you held your Union together?/ Through democracy:? / How many hundreds of thousands have died during your administration? Your Union sir is bonded in cannon fire and death//

L: It may be you're right/ But say all we done is: show the world that democracy isn't chaos/ that there is a great invisible strength in a people's union?/ Say we've shown that a people can endure awful sacrifice and yet cohere?/ Mightn't that save at least the idea of democracy to aspire to?/ Eventually, to become worthy of?/ At all rates, whatever may be proven by blood and sacrifice must've been proved by now?/ Shall we stop this bleeding?//

The conversation above could build the nationalism spirit of the citizens to the nations since it gives a view that democracy is a sacrifice. Only the citizen's unity could bring the stabilization of the country and build the democracy. Consequently, the citizens should keep their loyalty to the nations and participate to maintain the country.

Conclusion

The character of Abraham Lincoln conveys message to be delivered to the viewers. The movie maker knows well that movie is the best medium to spread out ideology. Since movie is entertaining and relaxing, movie maker could easily delivers their idea or belief to the viewer and would not give any suspicion towards the 'hidden' idea given to the viewer. There are several situated meaning conveyed by the movie. First is about Lincoln's the characteristics of an ideal president. Second message is Lincoln's believe of equality to all human. The last, the movie build the nationalism of the citizens by giving the flashback of the history of the nations. How it was hard to maintain the unification of the nations through the years of blood. Thus, it can encourage the citizens to keep up their loyalty to the country. These situated meaning are supported by Gee's seven building tasks which explain how Lincoln's speech could fits those situated meanings.

Lincoln character on Lincoln's movie applies Gee's seven building tasks on all of his speeches in the movie. He is wise to choose the right choices of words and maintain his position towards the addressee. Though Lincoln is a 16th president of US, he does not take for granted for any idea given to him from his people. He could position himself as a president, husband, father, friend, chairman, and the other positions. He could sustain his relationships and the connections of the conversation. He masters a lot of knowledge and applies it on his speech. Also, he knows well that the existence of context does influence his method to talks to the addressee in order to get his goal. These all images is set up by the movie maker(producer, director) to deliver their message to the viewer(s) through Lincoln's character about ideal president, equality, and nationalism.

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