

Constructed Language and Cultural Identity: A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Fremen Language in “Dune (2021)” Movie

Nurul Hilma Salimah¹, Otong Setiawan Djuharie²
UIN Sunan Gunung Djati ^{1,2}

Author's Email: nurulhilmasalimah@gmail.com; otongsetiawandjuharie@uinsgd.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

Fremen language is a constructed language used by the Fremen tribe in “Dune (2021)”, an adapted movie from a novel by Frank Herbert, with the same title. The movie follows a story of Paul Atreides, who went to a desert planet named Arrakis. This study explores how language shapes group identity by examining how the Fremen language is used in “Dune (2021)”. Through some selected scenes, the research employs a qualitative approach, by examining character interactions, socio-political dynamics, and the symbolic significance of the Fremen language in shaping cultural identity. The findings show that the Fremen language not only contributes to the film's cultural representation's authenticity but also reflects wider themes of adaptation, resistance, and the relationship between language and power. This study contributes to the discourse about constructed languages in media by highlighting how they enhance cultural identity and providing insights on the sociolinguistic implications of constructed languages in modern movies.

Keyword: *Constructed Language, Cultural Identity, Dune 2021, Fremen Language, Sociolinguistic*

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INTRODUCTION

Language determines identities and perspectives and is an essential instrument for cultural expression. The main focus of linguistic research is the thousands of languages that exist naturally. However, there are languages that people have purposefully invented, namely constructed languages. Although these constructed languages come in a wide range of forms and have been created for many different kinds of reasons, the majority share structural similarities with natural languages and are meant to be used or appear to be used in ways that are similar to those of naturally occurring languages. (Goodall, G., 2023)

Constructed languages have been created in large numbers around the four major historical periods, especially in Europe. The first one began in the 17th century, when various languages were created in an attempt to gain a deeper understanding of the world. In the second period, the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, various languages were developed in an attempt to address practical concerns related to international communication. Then the third period started at the beginning of the 20th century and continues to exist until today. During this time, constructed languages have become a significant component of fictional works (which includes books, movies, and television shows), and creating them have turned into a common hobby. Lastly, the fourth period is the present day, where constructed languages are essential to many types of psycholinguistic research. (Goodall, G., 2023)

In this study, the researcher will only focus on the third period of constructed language. Specifically constructed language used in Frank Herbert adaptation movie “Dune (2021)”, namely Fremen Language. The researcher attempt to understand how the Fremen Language contributes to the world-building and thematic depth of the movie by analyzing its cultural value through sociolinguistics lens.

This study attempts to highlight the significance of constructed language in improving the viewer's comprehension of the Fremen and their complex relationship with their harsh environment by thoroughly examining vocabulary and the relationship between language and identity.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the sociolinguistic aspects of the Fremen language in movie “Dune (2021)”. Focusing on how the constructed language reflects the social identity of the Fremen people. There are two main sources of data in this study, namely “Dune (2021)” movie and its movie script.

This analysis begins by selecting the phrases in the movie which include the Fremen language, the time when the characters speak the Fremen language, and the reasons why the characters use it. This study employs sociolinguistic theory from Ronald Wardhaugh and Janet M. to identify and analyze how language constructs social identity among the Fremen, including aspects of solidarity, group membership, and cultural significance.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

According to Ronald Wardhaugh and Janet M. Fuller on their book “An Introduction to Sociolinguistics”, sociolinguistic is the study of language in our daily lives, including how language works in our informal conversations, the media we are exposed to, and the existence of laws, policies, and societal conventions associated with language. (Ronald Wardhaugh, 2015)

According to Nathan Sanders, constructed language or conlang is an artificial language that is intentional product of individual human’s conscious imaginations. They contrast with natural languages, which are typically the focus of linguistics research and emerge naturally and effortlessly from the collective linguistic ability of humans. (Sanders, 2016)

One of those constructed languages is the Fremen language. Fremen language is a constructed language created by David J. Peterson and Jessie Peterson for Frank Harbert’s adaptation movie “Dune (2021)”, spoken by the Fremen tribe in the desert planet named Arrakis. Arabic is a major influence on the Fremen language. Apart from that, it also takes from other languages and cultures to reflect their unique culture and desert environment.

In this research, data was collected from the Fremen language in the adapted movie from a novel by Frank Herbert, “Dune (2021)”. Then the data was analyzed to see the Fremen phrases, the meanings, and also the cultural significance of the Fremen language used in “Dune (2021)” movie.

Shai-Hulud

This term appeared in the movie, spoken by a narrator.

“Preferring to inhabit the remotest regions of Arrakis, the Fremen share the deep desert with the giant sandworms known to the Fremen as Shai-Hulud.” (00:06:14)

In the movie, this term means “the eternal thing” or “grandfather of the desert”. Shai-Hulud refers to a giant sandworm that lives in the desert of the planet of Arrakis. Known for their speed and strength, and a danger for those who disrespect his territory. For Fremen, Shai-Hulud is a physical representation of the God of the universe and is considered as a form of divine intervention. They worship him and see him as part of their beloved universe. As can be seen when Dr. Kyes was being caught by the Harkonnen, *“I serve only one master. His name is Shai-Hulud” (01:56:06)*. Furthermore, the Fremen also often rides the worm and even hunt them. In real life, Shai-Hulud refers to an American metalcore group band that from in the year 1995, in Pompano Beach, Florida.

Lisan Al-Gaib

This term appeared in the movie, shouted by the Fremen people when Paul Atreides arrived in the planet of Arrakis.

“Lisan al-Gaib! Lisan al-Gaib! Lisan al-Gaib! Lisan al-Gaib! Lisan al-Gaib! Lisan al-Gaib! Lisan al-Gaib!” (00:36:17)

In real life, this term was a tribute to Hafez, the famous Persian poet known for his beautiful and mystical poems, after he died in the 14th century. Which translated as “tongue of the unseen realms”. In this movie, this term means “voice from the outer world” as Paul’s mother, Jessica, explained to Paul inside the Ornithopter (a bird-like form of air transport used by House Atreides on the planet of Arrakis), *“Lisan al-Gaib. ‘Voice from the Outer World.’ It’s their name for Messiah.” (00:37:49)*. It refers to a prophet from another planet who is predicted to save the planet of Arrakis. This term was given by the Fremen to Paul Atreides.

Sietch

This term appeared when Duncan Idaho just came back from his mission and reported it.

Duncan Idaho: “For four weeks, I lived with the Fremen. Hidden in the desert, in a community called a sietch. Stilgar, the leader of that sietch, has come with me to meet you, sire.”

Duke Leto Atreides: “This sietch, how is it hidden?”

Duncan Idaho: “It’s underground. Arrakis is filled with caverns.”

Paul Atreides: “How big was the place?”

Duncan Idaho: "I'd say 10,000 people. And there are hundreds of sietches."
(00:51:51)

Sietch is a type of settlement or community used by the Fremen, the desert-dwelling people of the planet of Arrakis. Usually found in caverns or other hidden natural formations, sietches protect the residents from a hostile attack and the dangerous desert environment. For the Fremen, they function as homes, social centers, and defensive constructions. One of these sietches is called Sietch Tabr a place where Paul Atreides and Lady Jessica, his mother, stay for the first time with the Fremen tribe. In real life, this term refers to Ukrainian Cossack word Січ (Sič)/сікти (sikty) which means "to chop", referring to the process of constructing a fort out of chopped wood or clearing a forest for an encampment.

Kwisatz Haderach

This term appeared in the movie when Paul Atreides tried to evacuate the people in the broken crawler, he heard an unknown voice whispering to him.

"Kwisatz Haderach. Kwisatz Haderach awakes." (01:06:04)

This unknown voice also appeared when Paul was about to fight Jamis in an Amtal.

"Paul Atreides must die... for Kwisatz Haderach to rise." (02:18:40)

In real life, Kwisatz Haderach is a term in Hebrew which translated as "shortening the way", referring to a mystical concept of instantaneous travel. In the movie, it refers to a male messiah figure bred by the Bene Gesserit with the capacity to cross time and space with divine ability and access the memories of both his male and female ancestors. While the Bene Gesserit themselves could only access their female ancestors memories. In other word, Kwisatz Haderah could essentially see paths others couldn't, including knowledge that was hidden or dangerous.

Crysknife

This term appeared in the movie when Lady Jessica, Paul's mother, choosing a servant. She chose a servant from a Fremen tribe named Shadout Mapes. Shadout Mapes hiding a weapon but apparently, Lady Jessica knows about that.

Shadout Mapes: "The weapon is meant as a gift if you are truly The One. ... Do you know this?"

Lady Jessica: "It's a crysknife."

(00:42:13)

In this movie, crysknife is a curved and double-edged blade, made from the tooth of Shai-Hulud, 20 centimeters long, with milky white and iridescent color. Usually, the tip of the crysknife was poisoned with an unknown toxin. For the Fremen, crysknife is a sacred weapon. When drawn, it was forbidden to be sheathed until it drew blood. Furthermore, no foreigner was allowed to see an unsheathed blade and leave Arrakis alive without first being "cleansed" in a complex ritual. In real life, there's a similar weapon in Indonesia, specifically in Java. This weapon is called kris/keris. Kris/keris is a traditional Javanese weapon, mostly used in the native martial art named silat.

Amtal

This term appeared in the movie when Jamis challenges Paul to fight in a battle with him.

"I invoke the amtal." (02:17:33)

According to Frank Herbert, amtal is a common rule in primitive worlds to test things in order to identify their limitations or flaws. In other words, testing to destroy. (Irizarry, 2013). In the movie, it is described by Stilgar that there's no yielding under this rule, and only death that can ends it.

"There's no yielding under the amtal rule. Only death is the test of it." (02:22:41)

In real life, this term refers to the Arabic word, Al-Amthal (أَمْثَال), which means proverbs.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Table 1. The Fremen Phrase, Meaning, and Cultural Identity

Fremen Phrase	Meaning	Cultural Identity
Shai-Hulud	Arabic: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shai (شيء) = something - Hulud (خلود) = immortality 	In movie: a giant sandworm that lives in the desert of the planet of Arrakis. In real life: an American metalcore band formed in Pompano Beach, Florida, in the year 1995.
Lisan Al-Gaib	Arabic: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lisan (لسان) = tongue - Al (ال) = the - Gaib (غيب) = unseen/hidden 	In movie: a prophet from another planet who is predicted to save the planet of Arrakis. In real life: a tribute to Hafez, the famous Persian poet known for his beautiful and mystical poems.
Sietch	Ukrainian Cossack: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sich (сiч) = an administrative and military centre for the Zaporozhian and Danube Cossacks. 	In movie: a type of settlement or community used by the Fremen. In real life: the process of constructing a fort out of chopped wood or clearing a forest for an encampment.
Kwisatz Haderach	Hebrew: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Kfitzat (קפיצת) = leap - Haderech (הדרך) = path 	In movie: a male messiah figure bred by the Bene Gesserit with the capacity to cross time and space with divine ability and access the memories of both his male and female ancestors. In real life: a term in Hebrew which translated as “shortening the way”, referring to a mystical concept of instantaneous travel.
Crysknife	Bahasa Indonesia: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Crys = kris/keris (a Javanese traditional weapon) English: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knife = an instrument for cutting 	In movie: a sacred weapon from the tooth of Shai-Hulud. In real life:

		a traditional Javanese weapon, mostly used in the native martial art named silat.
Amtal	Arabic: - Al (ال) = the - Amthal (أَمْثَال) = proverbs	In movie: a common rule on primitive worlds in which something is tested to determine its limits or defects. In real life: a term refers to the Arabic word, Al-Amthal (أَمْثَال), which means proverbs.

In conclusion, Frank Herbert adaptation movie, “Dune (2021)”, uses the Fremen language as a powerful instrument for narrative depth and cultural immersion. The Fremen language's unique linguistic features reflect their values, beliefs, and social structures, as well as reflecting the environmental difficulties they encounter. According to this analysis, the viewer's understanding of the Fremen as a unique and resilient community is improved by the precise development of this constructed language.

Furthermore, the way the Fremen language is portrayed in the movie highlights the wider value of fictional language in science-fiction by emphasizing how they enhance world-building and storytelling. The movie cultivates a greater understanding of the difficulties of identity and culture in fictional settings by immersing viewers in the linguistic nuances of the Fremen language.

As the field of fictional movie continues to evolve, studying constructed languages like the Fremen language will be essential to understand how audiences connect with fictional worlds. In order to increase our understanding of the art of fictional movies, further research into the effects of constructed languages in different movies and media could expand on the understandings gathered from this analysis and enable comparative studies that examine at how they function in other cultural contexts. Such studies could enhance our comprehension of constructed languages' function in storytelling by highlighting common patterns and unique characteristics. In addition, a more comprehensive framework for examining the complex connection between language and identity would be offered by a multidisciplinary approach combining perspectives from linguistics, cultural studies, and anthropology. New understandings of how constructed languages impact audience perceptions and cultural narratives may result from this.

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