REVEALING CHARACTERS' SOCIAL IDENTITY THROUGH REFERRING EXPRESSIONS IN "ETERNALS: THE 500 YEAR WAR" COMIC

Mohammad Syauqil Amin

English Literature Study Program, Faculty of Languages and Arts, Universitas Negeri Surabaya
E-mail: mohammad.20052@mhs.unesa.ac.id

ABSTRAK. Meski tergolong karya fiksi, komik memiliki beberapa kesamaan dengan dunia nyata, di mana para karakternya mengucapkan hal yang berbeda berdasarkan konteksnya. Penelitian kali ini akan mencari tahu identitas sosial yang ditunjukkan para karakter berdasarkan kata rujukan yang mereka tujukan untuk para musuhnya, sekaligus cara mereka menyepakati identitas sosial mereka satu sama lain. Dengan menggunakan metode dokumentasi, penelitian kali ini mengumpulkan datanya dari komik *Eternals: The 500 Year War*. Berdasarkan data yang didapat, penelitian kali ini dilakukan dengan metode kualitatif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan kalau para karakternya menggunakan semua jenis kata rujuk, yakni kata benda khusus, frasa nomina tak tentu dan frasa nomina pasti, dan pronomina, di mana jenis yang paling umum digunakan adalah frasa nomina tak tentu dan frasa nomina pasti. Hasilnya juga menunjukkan kalau karakter-karakter yang ada memperlihatkan kedekatan dengan menggunakan ucapan yang spesifik, sementara ucapan yang umum memperlihatkan jarak di antara para karakternya. Selain itu, penelitian ini juga menunjukkan kalau karakter yang ada menyepakati identitasnya satu sama lain dengan tiga maxim, yakni unmarked-choice maxim, exploratory-choice maxim, dan multiple identity maxim. Maxim yang paling sering di gunakan adalah exploratory-choice maxim, karena kebanyakan para karakternya baru bertemu satu sama lain.

Kata kunci: Komik; Kata rujuk; Identitas; Identitas Sosial; Negosiasi identitas

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ABSTRACT. *Despite being fictional works, comics share similarities with reality, where the characters often use different expressions in different contexts. This study examined the social identity shown by the referring expressions the characters used to refer to the enemy, as well as the way they negotiate their social identity among others. By using the documentation method, this study collects its data from the Eternals: The 500 Year War comic. A qualitative method is used to analyze this study, following the data gathered in this study. The result shows that the characters in this comic used all forms of referring expression, including proper nouns, definite and indefinite noun phrases, and pronouns, where the most common forms used are the definite and indefinite noun phrases. The result also shows that the characters show similarity by using more specific expressions, while more generic expressions are used to show differences between the speakers and listeners. The researcher also found that the characters in this comic used three types of maxims to negotiate their identity among others, which are the unmarked-choice maxims, the exploratory-choice maxims, and the multiple identity maxims. The most common maxim used by the characters is the exploratory-choice maxim, since the characters mostly just met one another.*

Keywords: Comic; referring expressions; Identity; Social Identity; Identity negotiation

INTRODUCTION

Despite being fictional works, comics have similarities that follow what exists in reality. Through the story, comics often portray different societies and human interactions, which reflect the reality people live in. As part of a narrative story, comics have settings as the context for the story, which portrays the society and culture of the characters. Even though the setting might appear crude, it will still show a certain context about where or when the story happened.

In the creation of comics, artists often build the world setting following what already exists in reality, whether partially or fully. Wolf (2012) said that fictional cultures often are constructed or cobbled together from various aspects or aesthetics of existing real-world cultures. Even though comics might not fully reflect a certain group or identity, they are still the product of certain aspects that exist in the real world. Therefore, comics can be analyzed as a reflection of real society.

In a comic, the setting of the story is often shown by using an image that indicates a certain place or by using a certain language that gives some clue about the setting. El Ayadi & Mamadouh (2019) believe that Individual language use may, for instance, hint at where people are from and with whom they identify themselves. López-Narváez (2023) said that the idiosyncratic use of language confers a specific speech to a person (or character), thus providing them with a specific identity. Hence,

the language the characters use might show their identity as well as to which social group they belong.

When people utter their speech, it is agreed that the language they use not only contains the meaning of their words but also additional information about their identity. Holmes & Wilson (2017) state that our speech provides clues to others about who we are, where we come from, and perhaps what kind of social experiences we have had. The similarities and differences in the way people refer might indicate how they relate to or differentiate themselves from a certain group. One of the guiding principles of linguistics is that people use different kinds of language in different social situations (Bramlett, 2012). By examining how someone speaks, particularly the way they refer to something or someone, the relationship between both speakers can be seen as they negotiate their identities.

The way people refer to someone not only shows how they see the referent but also their relationship with their interlocutor. When trying to analyze social identity in a comic, referring expressions play a crucial role as they convey familiarity and distinction between the speakers. Since people can change how they refer to someone, they can negotiate their identity and show to which group they belong. Raymond (2016) argues that reference forms give an opportunity to grammatically recalibrate who the speaker and listener are to one another, what context they are creating together, and what actions are being attempted within that context. By analyzing the reference forms that people (or characters) use, people can learn the way they see each other in a conversation.

In the *Eternals: The 500 Year War* comic, the characters use different types of referring expressions when they refer to the same enemies. There are different countries in this comic, and each country refers to the enemies differently. Since the enemies are unable to speak and confirm their identity, there is no precise way they should be referred to. This leads to the negotiation between the characters on which way they should call the enemies, since different groups of characters have their own way of calling the enemies. So, not only do different countries refer to these enemies differently, but they also change the way they refer to them based on whom they talk to.

With this distinction between the characters, this comic can be a suitable source of data to analyze the different identities, especially social identities, of the characters that exist in the comic. By looking at the pattern in the referring expressions used by the characters, not only does it shows the characters' identity, but also the way they see their interlocutor. Therefore, in this study, it is aimed to find out what referring expressions the characters use when referring to the enemy, what social identity is shown by those referring expressions, and how the characters later negotiate their social identity among the other characters. The data is taken from the *Eternals: The 500 Year War* comic, where it focuses on the conversation between the characters, especially the referring expression used to refer to the enemy.

Referring expression itself is a language form that is used in the act of reference. It includes proper nouns, definite and indefinite noun phrases, and pronouns. Appelt (1985) describes referring expressions as expressions that bear a semantic denotation relationship to objects in the world. Kibrik (2011) said that referring expressions are linguistic elements that perform a mention of a referent. Hence, although referring expressions consist of different language forms, it does not necessarily mean that all those forms are always a reference.

Reference is an act in which a speaker or writer uses linguistic forms to enable a listener or reader to identify something (Yule, 1996). If the linguistic forms are not used to identify a specific thing, but rather refer to any kind of thing, it is considered to be an attributive rather than reference. The words people use as a reference depend on what the speaker wants the listener to identify. It is tied to what the speaker believes the listener might understand. Hence, to ensure the reference is successful, the role of inference is also important.

The ability to identify what the speakers intend to refer to is called inference. Suvorova & Polyakova (2018) define Inference as an operating process or mechanism of receiving inferred information in the framework of the whole cognitive process of information processing. In the context of written text, Norvig (1987) defines inference to be any assertion that the reader comes to believe to be true as a result of reading the text, but which was not previously believed by the reader, and was not stated explicitly in the text. Although reference alone can not determine someone's identity, it could show the relations between the participants, since reference relies on the speaker's intention and the listener's ability.

Identity itself is the social positioning of self and others (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005). There are different principles in the construction of identity, which are the emergence principle, the positionality principle, the indexicality principle, the relationality principle, and the partialness principle. In the

relationality principle, it is believed that identity is constructed through several complementary relations that often overlap with one another. It includes adequation and distinction, authentication and denaturalization, and authorization and illegitimation.

Someone's identity is often constructed from different types of identity, such as personal identity, cultural identity, and social identity. Social identity is the result of the thoughts and feelings that arise when someone thinks about the groups they belong to (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019). Tajfel & Turner (1979) believed that social identity is an individual's self-image that derives from the social categories to which he perceives himself as belonging. In social identity theory, there are three processes to find out about someone's identity, which are social categorization, social identification, and social comparison.

Social categorization is a process in which people are classified into different categories in society. It classifies them according to certain criteria such as race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, age, etc. This concept is what then creates "grouping", as it groups certain individuals into different criteria based on the similarities they have. While social categorization classifies someone into certain categories, social identification is the way those people show that they belong to that category. The idea of social identification is that people not only believe that they belong to a certain category, but they also behave and show that they belong there. Hence, as there are different categories people relate to, it creates what is called the in-group and the out-group. Social comparison is the idea of comparing one group with another group that is different from it. Since people will always try to maintain their positive social image, they will try to compare their group with the relevant out-groups to make their group look better (thus, showing what social identity they have).

While there are different identities that people possess, it creates what is called identity negotiation. Identity negotiation is a transactional interaction process where individuals attempt to assert, define, modify, challenge, and/or support the desired self-images (Ting-Toomey, 1999). Janik (2019) said that identity negotiation is the process of affirming the identities we want others to recognize in us and the ascription of identities we mutually assign to each other in communication. In her theory, Scotton (1983) explains that there are six different maxims that are used to calculate conversational implicature in the negotiation of rights and obligations, which are the unmarked-

choice maxim, the deference maxim, the virtuosity maxim, the exploratory-choice maxim, the multiple-identity maxim, and flouting the maxim.

METHOD

In this study, the qualitative method is used to further analyze the data gathered in this study. The data collected in this study are the words, phrases, and/or sentences used by the characters in the comic that contain the referring expressions used to refer to the enemy. In order to find the data, the documentation techniques are applied to thoughtfully collect the data needed in this study. The *Eternals: The 500 Year War* comic is used as the main source of data, where it focuses on the chapters that contain the referring expressions used to refer to the enemy. Since there are different expressions used by the characters, they will be categorized by the speakers and the listeners to give a better understanding of the context of the referring expressions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Characters' Social Identity

The result shows that there are five countries mentioned (with the addition of the heroes' base) as the settings in the comic, including Japan, Korea, Cordoba, South Atlantic Sea, and China. While the characters use different expressions to refer to the enemy, those who have the same backgrounds often use the same expressions as the other. It creates a categorization between the characters who have the same background and shows what groups they belong to. Thus, to give a better understanding of the result, the characters will be categorized based on the background they have.

a. Japanese Group

The result shows that the characters from Japan mainly used two different expressions to refer to the enemy, which are an indefinite noun phrase, "an oni", and a definite noun phrase, "the kappa". They use the term "an oni" when they talk to the heroes they have just met, showing that they are trying to introduce a new concept to their interlocutor. Meanwhile, when they talk to the characters they are familiar with (which in this case, is the other Japanese characters and the heroes they met the day after fighting the enemy), they use the term "the kappa" to refer to the enemy.

The characters from Japan only use the term "an oni" to the heroes, whom they have just met. Although both terms are Japanese, the term "oni" has a more general meaning, where it is defined as a

type of demonic creature that often has a giant size, great strength, and a fearful appearance. Since the characters from Japan never use this term to the other Japanese characters, it shows that this term is specifically used to someone different from them. It shows that the characters from Japan perceive the heroes they just met as someone different, creating a distinction between them.

Different from the term "oni", the term "kappa" has a more specified meaning, where it is defined as a vampire-like, lecherous creature that is more intelligent than the devilish oni and less malevolent toward men. The characters from Japan mainly used these terms when they talk to each other, which shows that it is specifically used to someone the speakers are familiar with. Hence, although the characters from Japan were using the term "an oni" when they talked to the heroes, they changed it to "the kappa" after the heroes fought and defeated the enemy. It shows that the characters from Japan started to accept the heroes, creating an adequation between them.

b. Korean Group

The Korean characters, on the other hand, mainly used a proper noun, "Kumiho", to refer to the enemy. They mainly used this term when they talk to the other characters from Korea, which creates an adequation between them. The use of a proper noun shows that both participants of the exchange are part of the same community. Due to the lack of information given by a proper noun, the listener is expected to know already what the expressions refer to.

The result shows that the characters from Korea also used the pronouns "she" and "her" to refer to the enemy. It shows how the characters from Korea believe that the enemy is something that has an identifiable gender. Not only do they use the pronoun "she" to the other Korean characters, but they also use it when they talk to the heroes. It shows that the characters from Korea believe that the heroes perceived the enemy as something feminine as well. It creates an adequation between them, where the characters from Korea believe that the heroes see the enemy the same way as them.

Although the characters from Korea show similarity with the heroes, they once show a difference by using an indefinite noun phrase "living nightmare" to refer to the enemy. They use it when they first meet the heroes, questioning the way the heroes took the enemy so easily. The use of an indefinite noun phrase shows how the characters from Korea think that they are different from the heroes. Not only is the phrase used to introduce a new thing, but the term they use is also different from those they used with the other Korean characters. It also shows that they believe that they have more knowledge about the enemy by correcting the heroes and describing the enemy.

The characters from Korea describe the enemy as a fox with nine tails that attacks people. Therefore, when the heroes defeat the enemy, the characters from Korea use the term "the bewithcing fox" to refer to the enemy. In this case, they use a definite noun phrase, which shows that they are not introducing a new thing to the heroes, but rather referring to the previously introduced concept. Moreover, even though the characters from Korea once used the term "Kumiho" to the heroes, they did not use it referentially, to refer to the enemy. Rather, they used it to describe some parts of the enemy (like its tail and power).

c. Cordoban Group

Different than the characters from Korea and Japan, the characters from Cordoba could be categorized into two groups, which are those who came from the cathedral and the common citizens of Cordoba. The result shows that the heroes in this case are accepted by those who came from the cathedral as one of them, since the heroes were introduced to them by the pope. It is shown by the characters from the cathedral who use a more religious term to the heroes, while using a more generic term to the common citizens of Cordoba.

When talking to the common citizens of Cordoba, the characters from the cathedral use rather generic terms like "monsters" and "creatures". It shows how they are trying to distinguish themself from them by using a different term than what they use when talking to the heroes. They use a more generic term to ensure their interlocutor could understand, especially since in this case, the characters from the cathedral are trying to describe the enemy they just fought.

On the other hand, when they talk to the heroes, the characters from the cathedral use the term "demon" to refer to the enemy. The term "demon" itself means any malevolent spiritual being that mediates between the transendent and temporal realm. It shows how the characters from the cathedral use a more religious term when talking to the heroes, creating an adequation between them. It also shows that they assume the heroes could already understand what the term means, since they do not further explain it afterwards, and use it as a definite noun phrase.

d. South Atlantic Sea Group

Different than the previous groups, the characters from the South Atlantic Sea only once refer to the enemy, since they flee after witnessing it. They use the term "the kraken" by shouting to everyone on the ship, without specifying to whom

the characters talk. The term "kraken" itself means a large cephalopod creature that is believed to be able to drag a ship to the sea. It shows how the characters from the South Atlantic Sea have the knowledge about sea folklore and sailors. It also shows that everyone on the ship is assumed to have the same knowledge about it, since the term is used as a definite noun phrase. It creates an adequation between them, including the characters from the South Atlantic Sea and the heroes, since they are expected to share the same knowledge about the enemy.

e.   Chinese Group

Similar to the characters from the South Atlantic Sea, the characters from China also only refer to the enemy once. While the characters from the South Atlantic Sea fled from the area, the characters from China were getting defeated instantly by the enemy. It made the characters never have any further interaction between one another. The characters from China shout to everyone nearby by using the definite noun phrase "this monsters" to refer to the enemy. It shows how the characters from China are rather focused on the goals, which is to inform everyone to attack the enemy. They use a rather generic term that is assumed to be understood by everyone nearby, including the guards, the building workers, and even the heroes.

f.   Heroes Group

In the comic, the heroes are the only ones who talk to all the other groups and learn the different ways they call the enemy. Although the heroes sometimes follow and use the same terms as the other characters, they still consistently use the term "deviant" when talking to the other heroes. The result shows that the heroes only use the term "deviant" when talking to each other and only once, almost use it when they talk to the characters from Japan, where they change it before they finish their sentence.

Table 1. Expressions used by the heroes

No.	Speaker	Listener	Expressions used
1.	Heroes	Heroes	The deviant
2.			A deviant
3.			These deviants
4.			That deviant
5.			The prime deviant
6.			The attacker
7.			The second attacker
8.			The monster
9.			A monster
10.			That kappa
11.			Kumiho
12.			It
13.			They
14.			Themselves
15.	Japanese characters		This 'oni'
16.			The oni
17.	Korean characters		These creatures
18.	Characters from the cathedral		They

As shown in the table, the heroes not only used the term "deviant" as a definite noun phrase, but also as an indefinite noun phrase, even after using it as a definite noun phrase beforehand. It shows how the heroes, despite already knowing about the enemy, at a certain point still perceived the enemy differently. They remain consistent and only change it once they realize the different traits of the enemy they met in a certain country. This creates an adequation between the heroes, while at the same time, creates a distinction with the other groups, as they never use this term other than to the other heroes.

Despite their consistency with the term "deviant", the heroes also use the terms they learn in the other country, such as "Kumiho" and "kappa", to refer to the enemy. They use these terms to specifically refer to the enemy they met in that certain country, when they talk to the other heroes at their base. They even follow the characters from Japan by using the term "oni" when they talk to them. It shows how the heroes, in this case, are adaptable and understanding, as they could follow the other characters and adapt to their interlocutor. It also shows how the heroes here do not consider the Japanese characters as one of them, since they would rather follow the characters from Japan than use the term "deviant" to them.

Other than that, their understanding can also be seen when the heroes talk to the characters from Korea, where they use the term "these creatures" to refer to the enemy. They used this term when they

first met the characters from Korea who got chased by the enemy. They use a rather generic term to ensure that the Korean characters can understand what they refer to. It also shows their familiarity with the enemy, since in this case, the heroes are trying to reassure the characters from Korea not to get scared by the enemy. It shows how the heroes are capable of fighting the enemy, which later makes them get questioned by the characters from Korea, since they have already seen what the enemy could do.

Moreover, although the characters from Korea use the feminine pronoun "she" when they talk to the heroes, they never follow the Korean characters by using it. Despite calling the enemy they met at Korea with the term "Kumiho", similar to the Korean characters, the heroes never consider the enemy as a feminine thing. The result shows that the heroes maintain their consistency by using the pronouns "it", "they", and "them" to refer to the enemy. Not only do they use it among the heroes, but they also use it when they talk to the characters from the cathedral. It shows how the heroes here do not consider the enemy as something feminine, but rather as something neutral or indeterminate.

2. Identity Negotiation

Since the characters show different social identities among one another, by using different referring expressions to refer to the enemy, the result shows that some expressions belong to certain maxims in identity negotiation. Among six maxims introduced by Scotton (1983), the result shows that the characters used three maxims to negotiate their identity among one another, which are the exploratory-choice maxim, the unmarked-choice maxim, and the multiple-identity maxim.

a. The Exploratory-Choice Maxim

Since the characters often just met one another in the exchange, the result shows that the most common maxim used by the characters is the exploratory-choice maxim. This maxim is used to explore the unmarked choice for the current non-conventionalized exchange and sets the rights and obligations between the participants. The result shows that there are some expressions that are used as the exploratory-choice maxim.

The first one is the term "oni", which is used by the Japanese characters when they first meet the heroes. They tried to explore what expression can be used as they noticed that the heroes are different from them. While the heroes had the appearance of a normal human, they possessed a power beyond what a normal human could, which in this case is super speed. This creates a distinction between them, leading the Japanese characters to set a new

set of rights and obligations between them. It shows that the Japanese characters perceived the heroes as someone different by using a rather generic term, which is different from what they previously used among one another.

The other expression used as an exploratory choice maxim is the term "these creatures", which is used by the heroes when they first meet the characters from Korea. Since they never met one another beforehand, the heroes use a rather generic term when talking to the Korean characters. It is different from what the heroes used with the other heroes, which shows how they see the Korean characters as someone different than them. They try to explore what terms the Korean characters might accept as the unmarked choice for the current sets of rights and obligations. Although, since the heroes also show their familiarity with the enemy, the characters from Korea do not agree to use this term and initiate another term that they can use, as the Korean characters have a different idea about the enemy.

b. The Unmarked-Choice Maxim

While the exploratory-choice maxim focuses on exploring the unmarked choice the participants can use in a non-conventionalized exchange, the unmarked-choice maxim focuses on establishing and reaffirming the unmarked choice between the participants in a conventionalized exchange. This maxim is used when it is no longer the first time the participants met one another, or when they had some knowledge about their interlocutor.

In the comic, this maxim is used by the Japanese characters when they meet the heroes once more, after they defeated the enemy. While they used the term "oni" when talking to the heroes beforehand, in this context, the characters from Japan try to establish a new term they can use as the unmarked choice to refer to the enemy. In this case, the characters from Japan establish the term "the kappa", which is similar to the term they use to the other Japanese characters. It shows their acceptance of the heroes and creates an adequation between them. While it sets new rights and obligations between them, it does not necessarily make the heroes considered to be Japanese just like the others, but instead it shows their connection and knowledge about them.

c. The Multiple-Identity Maxim

Since there are different characters in this comic, some characters might show different identities to the others. The multiple-identity maxim is used to initiate different rights and obligations between the participants, as an act to show the different identities they have. In this comic, this maxim is once used by the characters from Korea

when they talk to the heroes. At first, they initiate the term "living nightmare" when talking to the heroes. It is used to question the heroes about the way they see the enemy so easily. It shows how the Korean characters here see the heroes as someone different than them, and have a different understanding about the enemy.

Afterwards, the characters from Korea also initiate the term "Kumiho" after they learn what the heroes can do. Although it was not used referentially, it sets new rights and obligations between them, as it is the same term they used to the other Korean characters. It shows how the Korean characters here see the heroes as someone the same as them. Although it does not necessarily mean the heroes are accepted as Korean, it still shows that they are accepted as someone on the same side as the Korean characters.

Moreover, although there are more maxims used to negotiate identity, due to the limitations of the data, the results only found 3 maxims used by the characters in this comic. Since most exchange in this comic is categorized as non-conventionalized exchanges, the data needed for the deference maxim, the virtousity maxim, and flouting the maxim is limited. Hence, further research on other comic titles is encouraged to further analyze the topic studied in this study.

CONCLUSION

The result shows that in this comic, the characters use all forms of referring expressions, which are proper nouns, definite and indefinite noun phrases, and pronouns. The most common form of referring expressions used by the characters in this comic is a noun phrase, which aligns with what Yule (1996) explains in his theory about noun phrases that are most likely used if the identification is rather difficult and needs more elaboration. Since the concept of the enemy is rather difficult and keeps changing depending on the countries, different terms are used by the characters to refer to them. It allows the researcher to group the terms they use, specifically the noun phrases, into two groups, which are those that are related to certain countries' folklore and those that are rather generic and descriptive.

While some terms have a close relation with certain countries, the researcher found that it does not necessarily mean that the speakers are part of those countries. The referring expressions used by the characters mainly show their relation with their interlocutor, which depends on the context in which they are used. When the characters feel somewhat distinct from their interlocutor, they use a more general term to refer to the enemy. On the other hand, when the characters feel a similarity with their interlocutor, they use a more specific term to refer to the enemy.

Moreover, since the characters show different identities among their interlocutor, the result shows that they also negotiate their identity among others. Although the theory explains that there are six maxims to negotiate identity, the researcher found that there are only three maxims used by the characters in this comic, including the exploratory-choice maxim, the unmarked-choice maxim, and the multiple identity maxim. The most common maxim used by the characters is the exploratory-choice maxim, since most of the exchange in this comic is categorized as non-conventionalized. On the other hand, the deference maxim, the virtuosity maxim, and flouting the maxim were never used, since they occur on a conventionalized exchange.

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