

The Representation of Literacy as Self-Improvement in Betty Smith's *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*

Dina Octavia

English Literature Study Program, Faculty of Languages and Arts, State University of Surabaya

dinarusiawan@gmail.com

Abstrak

Literasi bukan hanya sekedar kemampuan membaca dan menulis, tetapi kepada pemahaman yang lebih luas terkait dengan apa yang orang lakukan terhadapnya. Literasi dapat direpresentasikan dalam beberapa bentuk dan digunakan untuk tujuan yang berbeda-beda, salah satunya perbaikan diri. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk menampilkan representasi literasi sebagai perbaikan diri pada *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*. Metode yang digunakan adalah analisa tekstual, sumber utamanya adalah novel *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* oleh Betty Smith. Alan McKee dalam "Textual Analysis: A Beginner's Guide", menyatakan bahwa analisa tekstual merupakan metode pengumpulan informasi mengenai bagaimana seseorang menafsirkan identitasnya dan posisinya dalam dunia yang ia tinggali; mendeskripsikan fungsi makna dalam sebuah teks (McKee, 2001: 1). Studi ini berlandaskan dua teori besar; *Theory of Representation* oleh Hall (2013) dan *New Literacy Studies* oleh Gee (2013). Hasilnya mencakup representasi literasi dan bagaimana literasi mentransformasi Francie.

Kata Kunci: *representasi, literasi, perbaikan diri, artifak budaya, identitas*

Abstract

Literacy is more than just the ability to read and write, yet it goes wider to the idea of what people do with it. Literacy can be represented in several forms and be used for different purposes, one of them is as self-improvement. The aim of this study is to show the representations of literacy as self-improvement in *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*. The method used is textual analysis where the main source is a novel by Betty Smith's *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*. According to Alan McKee's "Textual Analysis: A Beginner's Guide", textual analysis is a methodology used to gather information about how people make sense of who they are and their position in the world they are living in; it describes the message's function of the text (McKee, 2001: 1) This study is based on two big theories; *Theory of Representation* by Hall (2013) and the *New Literacy Studies* by Gee (2013). The results are including the representation of literacy, and how literacy transform Francie's identity.

Keywords: *representation, literacy, self-improvement, cultural-artifacts, identity*

INTRODUCTION

This chapter addresses the overview of Representation of Literacy as Self-Improvement in Betty Smith's *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*. It provides several information such as background of the study, statements of the problem, scope and limitation, research methodology and the summary of related literature. The aim of this study is to show the representations of literacy as self-improvement in *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*.

A Tree Grows in Brooklyn is a great masterpiece written by Betty Smith, an American author, which has been adapted in several films and received achievements. Literacy is chosen for it has a potential as a breakthrough yet has not been widely discussed, especially in a form of a serious research. Literacy is something substantial

whether for a person individually or wider scope; family and society. This statement is supported by the study written by Agus Tri Wahyudi and Kuspriyanto- a student of Geography Education, State University of Surabaya, and his supervisor which pointed out that Illiteracy is one of the causes of backwardness in human resource development. He claims that if such potential is realized and people pay a big attention to it, women may use this opportunity to provide additional income for their families (Wahyudi and Kuspriyanto, 2012: 3). An English Education student of Language and Art Faculty, State University of Surabaya, Fibri Muji Precisely wrote a study which shows how literacy may give a valuable impact on a person's improvement in speaking ability. She also states a review from Thomas (2006) that claims how students who read extensively not only improve their reading proficiency and writing skills, but also their

vocabulary, and even their listening and speaking skill. *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* opens up people's mindset that being financially poor does not always guarantee you can never have a good life. Through this novel and analysis, we will see that what we do to transform the condition into the better one which matter. One of the most effective ways is through literacy. This study will show us besides adding more knowledge to the reader, a book may also change their life.

The research questions of this study will be around on what the representations of literacy are and how literacy transforms Francie's identity. The main focus is on Francie's improvement.

The method used is textual analysis. The main theories which are used to analyze the data are The Work of Representation and the NLS. The supporting theories are including the Theory of Figured World and the triumph of the world; Popular Culture and Representation of Literacy.

The first theory is theory of Representaion. According to Stuart Hall's "The Work of Representation" (2013), the general understanding of representation is that it means the use of a language, signs, and images to utter something, or representing the meaning of the world to others. In short, Hall points that representation is the meaning's production of the concepts in our minds through language (Hall, 2013: 2). Hall also states the three Theories of Representation (2013: 10). The first one is the reflective approach. In this approach, the meaning lies in the object, person, idea or event in the real world. The function of a language is to be the mirror which reflecting the real meaning as it is known in the world. Second, Intentional approach. Based on this theory, the meaning of the words depends on what the author intended to mean. The third approach is constructionist which points that there is no fix meaning in a language. The meaning depends on its symbolic function as it represents or symbolizes a concept (Hall, 2013: 11). So, it can be concluded that the theory of constructionist is the most suitable to be used as the approach for it focuses on the meaning of a language. Not only as a general meaning, but it shows that there can be different meanings in a language.

The second theory is the NLS. Gee and other scholars from different fields of study composed the New Literacy Studies. Referred to the statement of Gee in "A Situated Sociocultural Approach to Literacy and Technology", the New Literacy Studies or is known as the NLS confronted the traditional psychological approach of literacy which viewed literacy as a "cognitive phenomenon". In NLS, both the readers and writers are involved in social or cultural practices. Gee points that different social and cultural groups may use written language differently in different practices also. Language never stands alone, however, it is associated to different ways of using oral language; different ways of acting and interacting; different ways of knowing, valuing, and believing; and often different ways of using various sorts of tools and technologies. In NLS, one text can be read using different ways for different purposes (Gee, 2013: 3).

According to Deborah Brandt and Katie Clinton on their study entitled "Limits of the Local: Expanding Perspectives on Literacy as a Social Practice" (2002), Scribner and Cole (1981) first introduces the term of literacy practice and is redefined by Brian Street in 1984. For them, literacy practice is a more abstract concept which usually is associated with the things that people do with literacy along with the cultural significance they attribute to those doings (Brandt and Clinton, 2002: 6)

In addition, there are two supporting theories as the branch of the New Literacy Studies. The first one is Theory of Figured World by Dorothy Holland et al, and the second one is the triumph of the world; Popular Culture and Representation of Literacy.

First, based on the "Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds" (Theory of Figured World) by Dorothy Holland, William Lachiotte Jr., Debra Skinner, and Carole Cain, the idea of identities generally refers to one's rank, race, gender, ethnic, and social class. Identities happen in social practice (Holland et al, 1998: 7). Holland et al state that cultural tools can be used as a "pivot"- a mediating or symbolic device that the child uses to enter into an imagined world (Holland et al, 1998: 62). Besides Holland's work on "Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds", she also collaborates with Lesley Bartlett on "Theorizing the Space of Literacy Practices" (2001) where they a figured world of literacy is the idea of illiterates who are in effort to change being literates (Holland and Bartlett, 2001: 4). They point that figured world is established through the cultural artifacts, activities and identities in practice. Holland et al see improvisation as a way to create a difference for the next moment of production. They said it is possible for people to figure and remake their live condition (Holland et al, 1998: 57).

Second, Bronwyn T. Williams and Amy A. Zenger present literacy as salvation and commodity. In Popular Culture and Representations of Literacy they point out that besides functioned as a tool for the learners, or a useful skill in the world, literacy is also substantial to be functioned as personal transformation (William and Zenger, 2007: 157). Through the movie analyzations, the William and Zenger point that films show the picture of how illiterate people are being marginalized in the society (William and Zenger, 2007: 149). As it is written by William and Zenger, literacy can also be associated with economic growth, industrialization, wealth, and productivity (William and Zenger, 2007: 147). In order to support their statement, they said that Deborah Brandt, a researcher is also looking forward to connect literacy as an individual development to literacy as economic development (1998: 166). They symbolize literacy as a land, for them both are valued commodity in this economy. Just like a land, literacy can be the key source to gain profit and edge (William and Zenger, 2007: 152).

In order to understand what literacy is, "What is Self-Improvement?" (2010) an article by Let's Live Coaching describes the understanding of self-improvement. The writer states that self-improvement is more likely to be associated with the act of improving yourself. It includes one's personal development. The

personal development may scope some areas such as leadership skills, goal setting, visualization skills, organizational skills, time management, and mind power. It is written that self-improvement' idea is about efforts to change a person's knowledge, status, or character to be a better one.

The benefits of literacy is studied by Sachin Patki. Based on Patki's journal which entitled "Development of Speaking Skills through Authentic Literature" (2013), literacy can be used to help students with their lexical, semantic, vocabularies, phrase, idioms, or other aspects that increase their speaking skills (Patki, 2013: 1). It is written that stories are very effective to be used in developing one's speaking ability, and stories will enrich a person's visual imagination and creativity. He views stories will enable people to access information and store it in the brain, which means, adding more knowledge (Patki, 2013: 2).

METHOD

This is a literary research and the method used to dismantle the data is textual analysis. According to Alan McKee's "Textual Analysis: A Beginner's Guide", textual analysis is a methodology used to gather information about how people make sense of who they are and their position in the world they are living in. It is about understanding of the interpretations of the text. Textual analysis describe the message's function of the text. It is stated that texts are being interpreted in order to understand the world around them (McKee, 20011: 1). A classic novel by Betty Smith which entitled *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* would be the data of this study analysis. The characters are used as the representation of the community at that time.

Based on "Researching Literacy Practice: Learning from activities with Teachers and Students" in *Situated Literacy: Reading and Writing in Context* by David Barton, Mary Hamilton, and Roz Ivanic (2000), the Research Method used to analyze this study is as the following. First, we should pay attention on the observable aspects, such as identify particular literacy events, finding the evidence in Literacy Research. Second, identify the texts and analyse practices around the text, including what text it is, the use of the text, and the examples. Third, apply the concepts used in the New Literacy Studies, Social Practice; literacy as identity, salvation and commodity.

To be more specific, in analysing every evidence provided, we should take a closer look at the setting, it is about the location of where the literacy events taking place, what happens there, and why it is happened. Next, the artefacts, they include the material sources that involve in the literacy events, the text that present, how the text is identified by different participants, and the symbols. And then last but not least, the activities in which what the participants do with the material resources.

ANALYSIS

Two statements of the problems will be dismantled in this study. The first one is How is literacy represented in *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*?, Second is how does literacy transform Francie's identity?

1. The Representation of Literacy

Literacy is represented into two divisions. The first representation is literacy as identity, and the second one is literacy as salvation and commodity.

a. Literacy as Identity

Things around us can symbolize something, just like images of a nature can be used to symbolize our life. Tim Patridge on his article entitled "Trees in Mythology, Legend, Symbolism, and Religion" as a part of his chapters in "Yew Trees and their Inter-relationship with Man" (1993) states that trees are the symbol of nature's gladiator because of its power to standstill even in the most extreme condition. A Tree that grows in front of Francie's tenement symbolizes Francie's life. It also symbolizes a hope of living. It represents how a tree is impossibly growing up and survive to live in the district of Williamsburg, Brooklyn- a shabby area full of tenements occupied by poor immigrants; just like Francie. Both Francie and the tree are gladiators who are in struggle to keep growing up in a horrible situation. Francie shows that the positional identity given by the people to her as a weak, poor and a girl with a gloomy future is wrong, that she can prove them she can be a better person. Francie and literacy shows that one can grow up against the positional identity which believes that most children who live in Williamsburg will end up being poor just like their family. Katie's statement is the example.

"You are poor, Mother. Johnny and I are poor. The baby will grow up to be poor. We can't be any more than we are this day." (Smith, 1943: 49)

Katie has already felt haunted by the thought that her daughter will experience the ugly life just like she did. Her idea comes from the identities which lay on the people living in the shabby area of Williamsburg. They are uneducated, has an unpromising bright future, and marginalized. In order to make changes on this identity, there is one thing they can do. It is literacy that matters. Through literacy, there will be a great chance for them to improve their quality and identity.

Francie's identity is the combination of her families, social relation, and her personal world along with the cultural artifacts. As an individual, Francie is made from something that are not even exist in both families- something which differentiates her from other people in Brooklyn, something that makes her so special. The way Francie lives her life becomes one of the factors of how she can be she is right now.

"She was made up of all these good thing and these bad things. She was made up more, too. She was the books she read in the library... she was all of these things and of something more that did not come from the Roemmelys nor the

Nolands, the reading, the observing, the living from day to day.” (Smith, 1943: 44)

Through the habitual interaction and the use of literacy, literacy becomes one of the resource of the individual personal use and thus living an influence on Francie's thought, perspective, and behavior. Francie's life is surrounded by cultural artifacts and practices. There is no day without reading, writing, listening to stories, and applying what she has learnt on the real world. Such practices give influence to the development of her identity. Francie represents the books she reads. That is why, literacy is Francie's identity.

b. Literacy as Salvation and Commodity

In order to save your life, you need a commodity. According to William and Zenger, literacy is like a land, it is a valued commodity and is a key resource to gain profit and edge. (William and Zenger, 2007: 162). Before knowing the importance of literacy, Rommely's family lives in sorrow. However, Mary learns so many things through her experiences in life. One thing she realizes is that literacy is a very important tool- not only as a useful skill, but also as a salvation.

“Mary Rommely sighed. “That may be my fault. I knew not how to teach my daughters because I have noting behind excepting that for hundreds of years [...] I did not send my first child to school [...] But the other three... you went to school.”

“What must I do to make a different world for her? How do I start?”

“The secret lies in the reading and the writing.” (Smith, 1943: 50)

The reason why Mary Rommely first coming to America is to seek for a better future for their children. However, things are not the same as her expectation. It is not only the idea to move to the US that will make them have a brighter future, but education is the key. That is why, education is an important device to make changes. When children are educated, they have a bigger chance to make a different world for themselves. Therefore, she advices Katie to introduce her children the importance of literacy since the very beginning of their life.

Because of her mother advice, education is a priority for Katie. Unfortunately, most of those who are economically low tend to think that to get paid from the job is more important. This is because the stereotype is people go to school, get a job and collect money as much as they can. Unlike Katie who puts education on top of her lists, for many people around her it is still not a priority, Sissy's expression supports this statement; “*You can't eat a diploma*” (p. 191). That is why, most of the people in Francie's neighborhood don't really improve. The women for example, many of them don't have a high dream of continuing their level of education exceed high school and tend to choose working in the factory or end up being a very young mother. Nevertheless, Katie who is aware of literacy, want to create a better life for her children; to make them get beyond of what they parents have done in life. Because of this idea, she uses literacy as a commodity to save and improve their life.

2. Literacy and Identity Transformation

In this part of the discussion, it will be figured out how literacy transforms Francie's identity. Through the help of cultural artefacts such as books, novels, newspapers, teletype and many others, Francie is improving. Sharpened by the literacy practices including listening to stories, reading and writing, Francie's and her family's identity is improved. The improvements scope area of personal transformation such imagination, knowledge, language skills, and socio-economic growth.

People are developing from their positional identity. The society they are living in usually have a stereotype and this general thinking will lead to the designation of one's identity, for example; the self-identification as a higher caste, lower caste, superior, subordinate, strong, weak, educated and uneducated. Referring back to the theory, Holland et al state that whether individuals or groups are keep reforming themselves and make changes through the material sources. Literacy is one of cultural artifacts which functioned as a pivotal media to reach this improvisation. They claim that parental generation's improvisation is the beginning of the next generation. Improvisations are happened from generation to generation (Holland et al, 1998: 18). The same idea is proposed by Courtney Seiter's *The Surprising Power of Reading Fiction: 9 Ways it Make Us Happier and More Creative*”, where she states, “reading fiction can provide many of those same self-improvement benefits, even while exploring other worlds through stories that exist only in the mind” (Seiter, 2015). Reading is only one of the kinds, through this analysis we can see that so many forms of literacy practices may influence one's improvement. As it is on the story of *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, Rommely's and Nolan's family are also improving themselves through the help of literacy which is resulted to the personal transformation such as improvement on imagination, knowledge, language skills, and socio-economic growth.

3.2.1 Personal Transformation

Personal transformation or development is the part of self-improvement. It includes some areas, such as goal setting, skills, mind power, etc. People are changing. Literacy is one of the most affective media to bridge the improvisation from the positional identity to the figured world. Literacy is significant to be functioned as a personal transformation (William and Zenger, 2007: 157). Literacy can transforms Francie's identity. It improves her to be a better person. Personal development scopes some areas. Here are the following branches:

3.2.1.1 Knowledge

Knowledge can be obtained through several media. One of the most effective media to obtain knowledge is literacy. Clark and Rumbold on “*Reading for Pleasure*” cited the idea of Cunningham and Stanovich (1998) which point reading for pleasure (reading based on our own will

or interest) can both give impacts on reading achievement and increase general knowledge (Clark and Rumbold, 2006: 8). Francie loves to read so much. Usually, people have a presumption that poor people have lack of knowledge due to their incapability to obtain a good education and their laziness. For Francie, her economic condition is not a barrier to obtain as many knowledge as she can and she is a diligent. Through the help of cultural artifacts, she educates herself. The library is where she learns about so many information.

"She had a plan about reading all the books in the world. [...] Already she had read about bees and buffaloes, Bermuda vacations and Byzantine architecture. She planned to read all the books over again when she finished with the Z's. (Smith, 1943: 12)

Francie has a great passion in reading. This is a good foundation since if a person has a real interest on reading, it is going to be easier for her to take the lessons of what she has learned. Only by having this strong will, can Francie get the benefits of reading which one of the kinds is the increase of knowledge. Who has thought that a poor girl living in a slum area could ever know about Byzantine architecture? Then she must be the example of a literate girl trying to make herself more educated. Francie is in the process to read every book at the library from A-Z, which means, books that she reads are not always easy. When it comes to the heavy book, Francie realizes the difficulty to understand the content of that book, however, it does not make her to stop reading and skipping it. She continues to finish that book because she simply loves reading. Because of this, her brain is stored by so many kinds of information and it makes her rich with knowledge. Besides from the library, she gains information from the magazine her aunt brings to her every month. The magazine comes from Aunt Sissy's husband who is working at a pulp magazine house. He received copies of their publications such as love stories, wild-west stories, detective stories, and even supernatural stories. Francie reads every story on that magazine. By reading from a magazine, she will be updated of the latest information about what is going on, what is in, and many more. Since Francie reads a lot types of information, she becomes an open-minded person. One of the type of the stories which has the biggest benefit is the detective story. As an eleven years old girl, reading detective stories is very good as it may develop her ability in analyzing something and increasing her curiosity. Detective story will help

children to learn how to analyze a problem and finding out the process to solve it. As they read the story, their curiosity will be lifted up because of their eager to find out how the ending of the mystery is. Through the stories, people can learn from the characters, events, or other things which are unfamiliar in their life that are used to support the event on the story; what it is and what their function is.

Another way to add more knowledge through literacy is by reading newspaper. As a reader, Francie surely reads a lot of newspapers. By reading newspaper frequently, a person can obtain a lot of knowledge and other benefits. Devendra Kumar et al on their writing "Newspaper Reading Habits of University Students: A Case Study of Chaudhary Charan Singh University, India", propose reading newspaper will improve one's knowledge, it can also improve the reading habit and awareness. (Devendra et al., 2011: 2) This is because so many information such as what is happening are published on newspaper. (Kumar et al., 2011: 7). Francie's habit to read newspaper is started by her responsibility. When Francie was fourteen, she worked on the Model Press Clipping Bureau as a newspaper reader. She was working since she waited for the high school class to be opened on fall. She was paid 10 dollars a week. It was quite a big amount of money for her and her family. Then, the problem is arisen; the high school year is started when Francie gets a promotion to be the city reader with a wage 20 dollars a week. Francie is faced with two important decisions; she has to choose between stay working or go to school. But then, her boss gives her suggestion:

"Oh! I'm sorry to hear that. Not that I don't approve of higher education. But I consider newspaper reading a darn fine education. It's a good, live ever-growing contemporary education. While in school... it's merely books. Dead books," (Smith, 1943: 244)

Actually, her boss has a bad intention of why he says so. It is not because he is aware of the education through newspaper, but is because he does not want to hire someone whose skill is beneath Francie, but is working longer than her which means, he should have paid her bigger than he can pay Francie. However, without considering his sly idea, what he says about the advantage of newspaper is true. Higher education is undeniably important and beneficial, but when it comes to the situation just like the one Francie experiences, newspaper is a good alternative as a device to gain a lot of knowledge. Francie's boss gives a unique

comparison; dead books vs an ever-growing contemporary education. Newspaper Association of America® Foundation (2001) supports the idea of newspaper as a living thing. They state that a newspaper is more than news. People can find articles related to the interesting people or activities in the community. There is an advice column which provide valuable information. The most important is, newspaper provides better understanding of the news for it gives longer and more thoughtful appraisal of facts and details (NAA Foundation, 2001: 4). For Francie Francie's boss, the dead books represent education in school while the ever-growing contemporary education represents newspaper. This idea is acceptable for the subjects we study in school such as History, Geography, Chemistry, English, or Biology are something that has happened or has been found in the past. The materials that we study are the same, the books do not provide the latest news, but, newspaper provides different thing- it is alive. We can learn about politics, socio-economic, sports, literature, business, industry or other knowledge through this alternative education. A person who reads newspaper won't be left behind to update the newest events, not only those which happens in the nation, but overseas as well. This is an economist way to get ourselves more educated.

3.2.1.2 Imagination

A person's imagination can be improved through the help of several devices. One of the most effective one is literacy. This imagination may lead to numerous benefits for the participant. According to Clark and Rumbold on "Reading for pleasure; A Research overview" (2006), they cited a statement from International Reading Association (Moore et al., 1999, p. 3) which says, "*They (people) will need literacy to feed their imaginations so they can create the world of the future*" (Clark and Rumbold, 2006: 5). On the application, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* proposes the idea that there is one valuable thing that every child must have in this world; imagination. Mary Rommely describes the value of imagination:

"The child must have a valuable thing which is called imagination. [...] Then, when the world becomes too ugly for living in, the child can reach back and live their imagination. [...] Only by having these things in my mind, can I live beyond what I have to live for. (Smith, 1943: 51)

Imagination is something significant in our life, and literacy can help us to keep sharpening our imagination so that it will always growing in a positive way. There are some benefits of

imagination. First, it can be a very good place for someone to free herself from the ugliness of life. We are pretty sure that if someone is stuck around the negativity of life, then she will never be happy, while happiness is the most important aspect in one's life. In the case of Mary Rommely, her life is full of misery. She has a bad temperament husband, she is financially low, and her daughters' life is not far different to her. She has a lot of burdens. Sometimes, just like the other human beings, she finds that she is disappointed and angry to this life. The only thing that keep her mind healthy is imagination. Through the stories she has known, she withdraws herself from reality when the world seems too ugly to live in. Then, she goes to the memory of world where Saints or other great miracles are exist. Only by doing this, she can have once more- a better perspective about this life. She feels better after coming back from the imaginary world. This imaginary world gives her privilege to live beyond what she has to live for. Imagination provides her a better life to live in, even just for a while.

One of the secrets that makes her have a good imagination is her mind makes her feels like all the things she read she is alive. When a person reads words, it is possible that those words seem so alive. Anny Murphy Paul states that when we read, our brain gives respond on smells, texture and movements as if those things are real. For her, reading the interaction among fictional characters is being treated as real-life social encounters (Paul, 2012: 3). Francie feels the texts she read are alive. When she reads the word horse, she thought that she heard the horse is pawing the ground. Through her imagination, she pictures all the things she read on her mind. A part of human brain as it is explain by Paul has the ability to make it as if it is real. Because of this unique sensation, she enjoys reading and always feels excited about it, for she makes reading as her habit, her imagination is always sharpened and it is getting better every time. Thus, storytelling, reading, and other things that require literacy are the cultural artifacts which help Francie to obtain the benefits of literacy, such as good development on her imagination.

In addition, for some people having too high imagination is considered as inappropriate, it may be dangerous or leading to other negative impacts. However, in the case of Francie, her imagination is the beginning of her improvement in writing skill. Francie's imagination is very wide. There was a time when little Francie finds a bit difficulty to differentiate between imagination and reality. But, through the guidance of her teacher, she can finally take the good benefit of an imagination.

Once, Francie is asked to tell a story, yet, she finds that the story is too flat to be told. She cannot stand to put some color and drama on to make it more interesting. She does not mean to lie, it is just her mind is occupied by beautiful imagination and she wants to share it. Understanding Francie and looking at this little kid potential, the teacher states:

"I will not punish you for having an imagination. [...] In future, you tell exactly how it happened but *write down for yourself the way you think it should have happened. Tell the truth and write the story.*" (Smith, 1943: 124)

Instead of punishing her, her teacher sees that Francie has a good imagination and she can take the benefit from it. From that moment on, Francie learns something important in her life. She starts to change. She begins writing down things that she felt or did. That is one of the most significant beginning of her improvement on writing. She was so young, only ten years old when she realizes this. Then, it can be concluded that because of her imagination which is so wide, she starts to practice her writing skill and thus her creativity is increased for she is able to create a lot of kinds of stories, then her language skill is getting sharpened. Further discussion about language skill is as the following.

3.2.1.3 Language Skills

There are two language skills that are going to be discussed on this study. The first one is writing skill and the second one is speaking skill. In the case of Francie, she has excellent skills on language, whether in writing or speaking. Literacy is the key which transforms her improvement. Frequent activities which include language skill to take part in it will produce positive impact to the improvement of the skill itself.

Francie's mother plays an important role in introducing early literacy to her children. Francie's reading habit is shaped by her mother. She makes an obligation for her daughter and son to read a page from Bible and Shakespeare every day, every time they want to go to bed. Shakespeare is not an easy reading for sure. It contains a lot of figurative words such as symbolism, allegory, metaphor, and many more. Those words are certainly difficult to be understood, it takes practices, analyzation, and times to figure out the meaning. However, the meaning is not what Katie pursues. She just follows her mother's advice without knowing how wonderful it is that she has been introducing a literacy *canon* to her children for Shakespearean plays and poetries are considered to be one of the world's highest and most influential literature. For

centuries, common people up to scholars have been reading and studying Shakespeare's works regarding how great his work is. Surprisingly, Katie who is labelled as an uneducated woman because of her lack of education since she only reached 6th grade of elementary school, and is a janitor who knows nothing about the *canon* literature, is able to provide her children such terrific education.

"Before they went to bed, Francie and Neeley had to read a page of the bible and a page from Shakespeare. That was a rule. Mama used to read the two pages to the each night until they are old enough to read for themselves [...] They had been at this reading for six years and were halfway through the bible and up to Macbeth in Shakespeare's Complete Works." (Smith, 1943: 31)

Even though Shakespeare plays and poetries are heavy readings, Francie and Neeley have accustomed to read it. Since the words are not usual, it gives impact on Francie's language. Both Shakespeare and bible are using beautiful words and showing beautiful things in life. However, Nolan does not always treat Bible as a sacred book, but Bible as a literature, too. According to Jeanie C. Crain's "Bible as Literature" (2003), bible is considered as a literature for the themes and critical tools of literature are also found in the bible. It has myth, short stories, poetry, folktales, love lyrics, songs, etc. He states that a biblical story is a sequence of events with setting, character, and event (Crain, 2003: 15). Bible is the reading which gives wisdom and showing how to love others. To read it from a very young age, Francie's character is shaped very well, too. This is because bible contains a lot of moral values that a person could learn from the historical religious events. Through this holly book, Francie also learns about the value of life. However, she does not only see this religious book as a tool to learn about theology, she also sees the beauty of the world through bible as a literacy. Through the Shakespeare and bible, the library of Francie Nolan is started. Reading a page from Bible and Shakespeare everyday makes them get used to read heavy reading and rehearse their language comprehension.

Literacy can improve someone. Through her habit in reading, listening to stories, and writing along with her library visits and other literacy practices, she is able to improve her language capability. The improvements on language skills are seen through her writing and speaking ability.

- **WRITING**

Francie is transforming, from an escape literature writer into an interpretative writer. According to Chilly's article "A neglected theory on Literature" (2010) which is based on the 2nd edition of *Perrine's Story and Structure* by Laurence Perrine (1997), he explains the idea of Perrine in which he divides literature into two categories; escape literature and interpretative literature. When reading is treated as an enjoyment, this leads to the idea of "escape literature". Besides, "interpretative literature" is intended to bring the reader through the help of imagination to get deeper into real world (Chilly, 2010). Francie writes in honest about her life. She is a smart girl who has a good ability in analyzing something. Such ability and honesty of what she has seen or experienced, she brings them up on her writing. Unfortunately, that kind of honest-writing has not yet well appreciated by most of the people. It is considered as taboo.

"You said we could choose our own subjects."

"But poverty. Starvation, and drunkenness are ugly subjects to choose. We all admit these things exist. But one does not write about them. [...] One delves into imagination and finds beauty there. [...] Beauty is truth, truth is beauty."

"Those stories are the truth."

"None sense! [...] by the truth, we mean things like the stars always being there and the sun always rising and the true nobility of a man and mother-love and love for one's country..." (Smith, 1943: 203)

This is the evidence of how two participants may appreciate the same literacy differently. Francie is an escape and interpretative reader and writer, while her Miss Gardner is an escape reader and writer. Francie delivers new idea and angle to see and appreciates the life of the poor. Francie describes things that are in contrary to the society's belief. She understands her world and is trying to make others understand deeper about the world they are living in as well. In contrast, Miss Gardner believes that one should only read and write beautiful things such as how beautiful sunset is, etc. For her, writing down negative aspects in life is something inappropriate and is not a public consume. That is why, Francie's idea should be banned Francie, who is told that they can choose whatever subject they want to write about, has chosen to pick up the topics on the society which is based on the actual events. The teacher does not want to understand her intention. All she understands is that she wants her students to only write about good things in life. For her, writing

down those negative aspects in life is something inappropriate. She represents the society who has an old mindset which thinks that bad things in life should not be written down. The society may be afraid if people start to write such things, it may put the moral and culture in dangerous. They all know that those things exist, that is enough. They thought bad things should be kept, not for a public consume. Francie could not understand this kind of mindset. She does not understand why there are truth things about life that should not be written down. She does not easily accept the idea of why she should always make up stories that are not even exist just to make an 'A' score, why the teacher could not accept her idea. Francie is in her process of figuring out and learning about diversity of people seeing things, the taboo things that should not be discussed and things that should not be written down. Francie, who is different compare to the other children on her age, has a different way of seeing things. She sees things, analyses them, and trying to express her emotion, idea, or feeling through her writing. But the teacher thinks that this is a declining of Francie, which is why she gives a 'C' instead of the usual 'A' for Francie's latest compositions. However, through literacy, Francie learns to express herself through the writing and what she does is good for she is the one who has the nerve to break the boundary of someone's right to express their thought. She is a good example who through her voice, people can start to realize something they may not notice on the daily life before. Even though she gets a 'C' seems like a descendant, beyond than that, it is actually an improvement. Score does not always determine someone's success. In the case of Francie, the 'C' score is given not because of her incapability to produce good writing, but due to the different perception between her and her teacher. However, Francie is improving; from a common writer who only writes about escape literature, into a more advanced writer who is able to write interpretative literature. She is now aware of the world around her and has a better understanding about the actual world and how to deal with it. She does not only write for pleasure, but for having a better understanding of her life and herself.

- **SPEAKING**

Speaking is one of the language abilities that is usually acquired after one starts to listen. To have a good speaking skill takes practices and one can have a better skill at language through the help of literacy. According to Patki on "Development of Speaking Skills through Literature", he points that Literacy may be used to develop students' lexical, semantic, vocabularies, phrase, idioms, or other

aspects which increase their speaking skills (Patki, 2013: 1). Literacy can give impact on a person's speaking skill. Francie's good speaking ability is shown since she was a kid. One of the factors may be because of her mother story-telling habit.

Higher caste society in general often thinks that poor people have lower skill on language. They often underestimate their language capability due to their lack of education, environment, or habit. Valerie Strauss (2013) on "Five stereotypes about poor families and education" also points the same idea in which based on the study, it is written that poor people are linguistically deficient and poor communicators. However, Francie is the example that poor people can against this stereotype. Because of Francie's behavior in reading and other literacy practices, she becomes a person with a good understanding of spoken and written text. First, is the example of Francie's good understanding of a spoken text.

"My brother is next. His arm is just as dirty as mine so don't be surprised. And you don't have to tell him. You told me."

"I had no idea she'd understand what I was saying." (Smith, 1943: 91)

This is the indirect conversation between Francie, the nurse, and the doctor. It is on Francie's vaccination day when she hears that the doctor is telling the nurse how dirty the poor kids are. Francie's hands are dirty because she forgets not to wash them after playing with the mud. The doctor claims that all poor kids are always playing in filth and are too lazy to wash themselves. The nurse, who Francie can tell from her accent was also a poor Williamsburg girl, but she shows no understanding or sympathy toward the poor kids' condition, she mocks them, too. Francie pities the nurse character for she chooses to forget her low environment rather than keeping the compassion and understanding. Most of all, Francie feels disappointed hearing a very well educated Harvard graduate doctor can have such heart to speak lowly and badly about a little kid in front of her as if the kid knows nothing about what they are talking about. This is because the doctor in fact, thought that this poor little girl has no capability to understand what he was saying. Since he does not directly states Francie as the object of their conversation, yet he implicitly means her. However, Francie who is smart understands that she is the topic of the conversation. Although the doctor does not say that she is dirty, she knows that he means she is dirty because he says something related to filth, the poor does not wash and the way he asks

the nurse to look at her arm. Francie clearly gets the intentional meaning of the conversation. It shows how a well-educated doctor can still misinterpreting how this little girl even though she is poor, but is also well-educated privately and has a good understanding of language.

Second, Francie's good understanding of a written text. It is also because of her reading behavior. Based on Clark and Rumbold on "Research Evidence on Reading for Pleasure", reading for pleasure has benefits, some of them are text comprehension and grammar (Clark and Rumbold, 2006: 3). Francie always reads the work of Shakespeare and other novels which are mostly contain figurative words, could be idioms, symbols, metaphor, or many others. Thus, such behavior is resulted to her good comprehension on some expressions, as it is portrayed by this example.

"And the tears stood in her eyes."

"How could that be? Neeley wanted to know. "Tears have no legs. They can't stand."

"He didn't mean that. He meant it like when people say, 'I stood in bed all day'" (Smith, 1943: 236)

Although Neither the sister, nor the brother has ever heard that expression before, Francie who loves to read novels has better understanding of the meaning rather than Neeley who does not. Neeley describes the meaning literally as stood means standing by legs, yet Francie can interpret the meaning correctly. She understands that it should not be translated literally for it must represent something else. Thus, she try to go beyond the literal meaning and guessing what it actually means. Then, she remembers there is an expression using the word "stood" and she thinks they both have a close meaning. So, she answers Neeley's question not by explaining clearly what it means, but she gives another example of a more general expression which contains the same intentional meaning, it is: 'I stood in bed all night'. By having this explanation, Neeley finally agrees that they may have the same meaning and it makes him get a better understanding of the first expression. Francie does not only know the meaning but is able to apply it into her own context. For example, Neeley asks to Francie whether their mother is mad about something that she leaves them silently to the bedroom, Francie explains that their mother is not mad, but she is about to cry knowing their children give her a present and the tips from their hard work. Neeley asks how she can tell that. Then she answers by using the new expression "*Cause. When she looked at the money, I saw tears stood in her eyes*" (p.

237). This evidence explains that Francie knows the meaning of the expression and is able to apply it based on her situation. Those are the example of how through literacy's help, Francie who was labeled as a poor little girl with low language comprehension can actually have good understandings of both spoken and written text.

2.1.4 Socio-Economic Growth

A person's condition socially and economically can both support and destroy their opportunity to be literate and obtain a better future. If they have a good social position, along with a fine financial condition, it is going to be easier for them to have a promising future. In contrast, if ones are on the low position at the society, and is financially difficult, they have to work harder in order to change their condition. A lot of people are wishing to have a better life. That is why, their socio-economic condition mostly encourage them to make an improvement on their life. Thus, literacy is one of the device to help them realizing their dream. This idea is accordance to the study proposes by William and Zenger. On "The Triumph of the World: Literacy as Salvation and Commodity", it is written that literacy is associated with economic growth, industrialization, wealth, and productivity (William and Zenger, 2007: 156). Their idea is supported by a researcher named Deborah Brant which connects literacy as an individual development to literacy as an economic development (Brant, 1998: 166). The same thing happens to Nolans and Rommelys who are also wished to improve their socio-economic condition.

What we do to our life is very valuable to determine who we are at present. Generations before Francie experienced the negative impacts of being illiterate. From the side of Rommely, Grandma Rommely is the one who realizes the importance of literacy in one's life in order to improve their life.

"Your children have not done better than you." Katie

Marry Rommely sighed. "That be my fault. I knew not how to teach my daughters because I have nothing behind me excepting that for hundreds of years, my family has worked on the land of some overload. [...] I was ignorant and did not know at first that children of folk like us were allowed the free education of this land." (Smith, 1943: 50)

Poverty is the cause of their lack of education, and a lack of education may lead to a life of hardship as it is experienced by Mary. Mary who is an uneducated has no capability to teach her daughters

the knowledge they should have known. It is true that parents' role may give strong influence toward the children's life. Parents are the greatest example for their children. What they do, what they teach their children to do, are significance to the development of their child. If parents teach nothing, then their children will learn nothing as well. All this time, Mary only follows what her parents do, working on the land of others'. Until one day, she realizes that she should have moved on and make changes in her life, it all starts by herself. Her moving to America was a good start, but the key to the improvement is on education. At the moment she already has four children, she finally figures out that the keys of a better life are on reading and writing. Her socio-economic condition is one of the boosters of her trying to regenerate her family. Nothing is too late to make changes, from that time on, she sent her other children to school and she keeps on each of theirs mind the importance of education. Then when one of her kid already has her own kid, she can pass on such understanding to the children. So, by doing this, there is a widely opened possibility for the next generation of Rommelys to have a brighter future.

Literacy also gives a great benefit to Francie's economic improvement through her job as a reader in the Model Press Clipping Bureau, New York. Unlike the other women in her neighborhood who mostly stuck in the same kind of life, Francie pulls herself out of that life style. Francie used to work in a local factory whose job is to cover the wires. On her very first day, she is frightened by the idea that it is going to be her whole life, just like what happen to the other workers. Then, she remembers her grandma's conviction which says this is because they have no enough education. She is afraid that she cannot obtain the higher education. But then, her life changes when she decides to stop from that job and try the new one. She applies for a position as a file clerk in the Model Press Clipping Bureau, New York. This is the beginning of her success. She was paid 5 dollars a week at the factory, then as a file clerk she is paid 7 dollars a week, this is the first improvement on her economy. As a clerk, Francie can remember the thousand or more names and headings on the file box, thus, her position is lifted up. She is trained to be a reader. Reading and memory cannot be separated because they both give impact to each other. Francie reads a lot during her life, and reading can sharpen her memory. Then, her memory can make her becomes a better reader. The result is, a promotion on her job.

"Soon after she was given the New York state papers, and now had three states to read. By the end of August, she was reading more papers and marking more items than any other reader in the Bureau. She read between a hundred and eighty and two hundred newspaper a day." (Smith, 1943: 240)

Francie has passed the training and finally becomes a reader. She is able to read such a lot numbers of newspapers. This must be not a too difficult thing to do for she has been accustomed to read a book a day since she was a little girl. Her reading habit helps her being a fast reader. Her boss trusts her and the fact about how good Francie's reading ability has been spread over the office, then the label of a fast reader is given to her. For finally raised to be a reader, her payment is increased as well, from 7 dollars per week up to 10 dollars. This is the second economic improvement.

In addition, Francie's position is the middle of the two classes in the office; the club class and the reader. The Club is considered to be the less-educated class for the members are mostly illiterate but sharp-witted people such as the cutter, printer, paster, paper baler, and delivery boy. While the readers are people with better education. It is written that based on Francie's background and education, she belongs to the Club. But by ability and intelligence, she is considered to be the members of the reader. This is the example of how it takes more than just education in order to be placed in a better position at the society, but intelligence and ability are also necessary. Francie has proven that even though she is educationally less than her colleagues, she can stand out to be more capable in doing her job rather than them. One of the biggest improvement in Francie's job is her promotion to be the city reader.

"She thought it was preposterous, that she, a girl of fourteen, with nothing but a grade school education, would be considered eligible to take over the work of a thirty-year-old college graduate like Miss Armstrong." (Smith, 1943: 242)

Francie, who has an excellence reading ability since she was a kid finds reading is a fun thing to do. That is why she can do her job well for the most exciting job in this world is the hobby which is paid. As a worker, she is very professional and does every job which is given to her maximally. By having this spirit, her education background is no

longer an obstacle which can slow her down in her process to win the success. Everyone realizes her potential, which is why, her boss gives her a promotion to replace the city reader position. This is almost an impossible offer given to her regarding her education can defeat those whose education is the level of high school or even college. However, sharpening by her reading behavior, and other literacy practices, she can obtain such great skill and thus, it makes her truly capable and deserve the position. This opens up the idea that education is not the only guarantee which makes a person more skilled. It surely is important and beneficial, but in case a person is having lack of financial and could not obtain such privilege to go to a higher level of education, literacy can effectively help them to gain knowledge, skills or other benefits to support them become a better qualified person. It is told that most of the readers are graduated from high school and picked up an extensive vocabulary from years of reading, but Francie, she privately enriches her vocabularies with the help literacy through reading books, listening to stories and writing. Those literacy practices transform her to be the person she is right now; a fast reader whose competence is higher than those who are better-educated. Francie now is no longer a marginalized, uneducated person, yet is a well-educated person whose socio-economic condition is good and a brighter future is waiting for her. Because of this, her identity is improved. This is how literacy transforms Francie's identity.

REFERENCES

- Bartlett, Lesley and Dorothy Holland. 2001. Theorizing the Space of Literacy Practices. [PDF File]. Retrieved on March 16th, 2016. URL https://www.researchgate.net/publication/238355394_Theorizing_the_Space_of_Literacy_Practices
- Barton, David, Mary Hamilton, et al. 2000. *Researching Literacy Practices: Learning from Activities with Teachers and Students*, in *Situated Literacies: Reading and Writing in Context*, ed. David Barton, Mary Hamilton, and Roz Ivanic. London and New York: Routledge
- Brandt, Deborah and Katie Clinton. 2002. Limits of the Local: Expanding Perspectives on Literacy as a Social Practice. [PDF File]. Retrieved on December 7th, 2015. URL <http://jlr.sagepub.com/content/34/3/337.full.pdf+html>
- Chilly. 2010. A neglected theory on Literature. [Online]. Retrieved on April 28th, 2016. URL <http://www.online-literature.com/forums/showthread.php?56675-A-neglected-theory-on-Literature>.

- Clark, Christina and Kate Rumbold. 2006. Reading for Pleasure; A research overview. [PDF File]. Retrieved on March 22nd, 2016. URL http://pennykittle.net/uploads/images/PDFs/Reports/Reading_pleasure_2006.pdf
- Crain, Jeanie. 2003. Bible as Literature. [PDF File]. Retrieved on March 8th, 2016. URL http://crain.english.mwsc.edu/bible_as_literature/contents.htm
- Gee, James Paul. 2013. A Situated Sociocultural Approach to Literacy and Technology. [PDF File]. Retrieved on January 18th, 2016. URL <http://www.csun.edu/sites/default/files/James-Gee-sociotech.pdf>
- Hall, Stuart. 2013. The Work of Representation. [PDF File]. Retrieved on January 18th, 2016. URL http://uk.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/66880_The_Work_of_Representation.pdf
- Holland, Dorothy, William Lachiotte Jr., et al. 1998. Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds. [PDF File]. Retrieved on January 7th, 2016. URL http://www.infoamerica.org/documentos_pdf/holland02.pdf
- Kumar, Devendra, Rajkumar Singh and Jamal Siddiqui. 2011. Newspaper Reading Habits of University Students: A Case Study of Chaudhary Charan Singh University, India. [PDF File]. Retrieved on March 15th, 2016. URL <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1488&context=libphilprac>
- Let's Live Coaching. 2010. What is Self-Improvement? [Online]. Retrieved on December 12th, 2016. URL <http://letslive.info/self-improvement/>
- McKee, Alan. 2011. Textual Analysis: A Beginner's Guide. . [Pdf File]. Retrieved on May 10th, 2016. URL http://www1.cs.columbia.edu/~sbenus/Teaching/ATD/McKee_Ch1.pdf
- Newspaper Association of America® Foundation. 2001. Newspaper in Education: A Guide for Weekly/Community Newspaper. [PDF File]. Retrieved on March 16th, 2016. URL <http://www.tnpress.com/NIE/NIEguide.pdf>
- Paul, Annie Murphy. 2012. Your Brain on Fiction. Retrieved on March 5th, 2016. [PDF File]. URL <http://www.thc.state.tx.us/public/upload/publications/The%20Neuroscience%20of%20Your%20Brain%20on%20Fiction.pdf>
- Patki, Sachin L. 2013. Development of Speaking Skills through Literature. [PDF File]. Retrieved on November 10th, 2015. URL http://www.tgpcet.com/Ejournal/80%20PAPERS%20PDF/sachin_Patki.pdf
- Patridge, Tim. 1993. TREES IN MYTHOLOGY, LEGEND, SYMBOLISM and RELIGION. [Online]. Retrieved on March 3rd, 2016. URL <http://www.ancient-yew.org/mi.php/trees-in-mythology/79> http://www.tgpcet.com/Ejournal/80%20PAPERS%20PDF/Sachin_Patki.pdf
- Precisely, Fibri Muji. 2014. The Use of Authentic Literature in Teaching Speaking Skill for Eleventh Graders of SMA Negeri 2 Sragen. [Online]. Retrieved on January 5th, 2016. URL <http://ejournal.unesa.ac.id/index.php/retain/article/view/7571>
- Seiter, Courtney. 2015. The Surprising Power of Reading Fiction: 9 Ways it Make Us Happier and More Craetive. [Online]. Retrieved on March 5th, 2016. URL <https://open.buffer.com/reading-fiction/>
- Strauss, Valerie. 2013. Five Stereotypes about Poor Families and Education. [Online]. Retrieved on March 28th, 2016. URL <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2013/10/28/five-stereotypes-about-poor-families-and-education/>
- Wahyudi, Agus Tri, and Kuspriyanto. 2012. Pengaruh Faktor Sosial dan Ekonomi Orang Tua Terhadap Buta Aksara Anak Usia Sekolah Di Kecamatan Sumber Wringin Kabupaten Bondowoso. [PDF File]. Retrieved on January 5th, 2016. URL <http://ejournal.unesa.ac.id/article/1601/40/article.pdf>
- Williams, Bronwyn T., and Amy A. Zenger. 2007. *Popular Culture and Representations of Literacy*. New York and London: Routledge