

Exploring the Microinsult Strategy (Assumption of Criminal Status) in *12 Years a Slave* Through the Judgment System

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Abstract—Assumption of criminal status is a microinsult subcategory within racial microaggressions, explored in this study through the appraisal system of judgment to analyze its depiction in the movie *12 Years a Slave*. The research focuses on utterances containing judgment evaluations, extracted from narrative stages, including Orientation, Complication, and Resolution. Data were collected through Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with linguistic experts and analyzed using Spradley's (2016) framework, modified by Santosa (2021), encompassing domain, taxonomy, and componential analyses. Findings indicate the prevalence of microinsults across the film's narrative stages, with specific judgments categorized into social esteem (SOC)—normality, capacity, tenacity—and social sanction (SAC)—veracity and propriety. In the Orientation stage, microinsults were minimal, with evaluations highlighting normality and propriety. The Complication stage showed significant intensification, with 27 instances, including capacity (10), tenacity (3), veracity (7), and propriety (7), reflecting heightened racial bias and prejudice. In the Resolution stage, microinsults persisted with 16 evaluations, predominantly propriety (15), suggesting moral judgment remained a focal point. Overall, 45 judgment evaluations were recorded: 2 in normality, 10 in capacity, 3 in tenacity, 7 in veracity, and 23 in propriety. These findings underscore how the assumption of criminal status is systematically embedded and reinforced through various evaluative dimensions, aligning with the narrative's portrayal of racial microaggressions. This study contributes to understanding racial microinsults in media, emphasizing how cinematic narratives perpetuate social biases through evaluative judgments.

Index Terms—racial microaggression, Appraisal Theory, Systemic Functional Linguistics, film studies, racism

I. INTRODUCTION

Racism is a structured social system in which the dominant racial group, based on an ideology of inferiority, classifies and ranks individuals into social groups known as "races". They use this power to devalue, disempower, and unfairly allocate valuable societal resources and opportunities to those defined as inferior (Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Williams, 2013). Race is primarily a social construct shaped by markers such as nationality, ethnicity, phenotypic traits; all of which reflect unequal access to power and resources in society (Williams, 1997). Racism operates on multiple levels. Cultural institutions within society socialize the population to accept the inferiority of non-dominant racial groups as a truth. This belief leads to negative stereotypes and prejudices toward stigmatized racial groups, which in turn support discriminatory treatment of these groups by both individuals and social institutions (Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Williams, 2013). A key characteristic of racism is that its structure and ideology can persist within government and institutional policies, even in the absence of explicitly racially prejudiced individuals (Bailey et al., 2017).

Racism functions as a structured system that interacts with other social institutions, influencing and being influenced by them, to uphold, rationalize, and perpetuate a racial hierarchy. It has established a series of dynamic, interconnected components or subsystems that mutually reinforce one another, creating and sustaining a cycle of racial inequities across various sectors of society (Reskin, 2012). Therefore, structural racism exists within, and is supported by, various societal systems, including housing, labor, and credit markets, as well as the education, criminal justice, economic, and healthcare systems. Consequently, racism adapts over time, preserving its widespread harmful effects through multiple mechanisms that evolve to replace previously reduced forms (Phelan & Link, 2015; Williams, 2013).

The concept of structural racism described above provides a framework for understanding the deeply embedded and adaptive nature of racism across various societal institutions. Feagin (2006) argues that "racism is a systemic and institutionalized phenomenon, deeply embedded in social structures, practices, and policies". This understanding is particularly relevant when examining racism in the United States, where systemic inequality has been historically and persistently woven into the fabric of the nation's key institutions. From the nation's founding to the present day, the racial hierarchy created by institutionalized racism has shaped access to resources, opportunities, and rights for people of color, particularly African Americans. In the context of the U.S., racism not only continues to manifest in overt ways but also operates subtly within laws, policies, and social norms, reinforcing racial disparities in areas such as housing, education, and criminal justice. Collins (2000) notes that "racism operates through intersecting systems of power, creating inequality not only in race but also in gender, class, and sexuality". Thus, the enduring impact of racism in the U.S. is not only a reflection of individual prejudices but also of a larger, structural system that perpetuates inequality across generations.

Black Americans have long been exposed to both systemic and personal racism, which sustains disparities in multiple facets of life. Discrimination against Black individuals is not only a contradiction to the fundamental principles of fairness and equal opportunities in the United States, but it also leads to significant health disparities, contributing notably to the health gap between Black and White Americans (Colen et al., 2018). Black Americans, in particular, have been historically subjected to both institutional racism (such as policies and practices that hinder access to opportunities and perpetuate racial inequalities, like residential and educational segregation) and interpersonal racial discrimination (such as direct discriminatory interactions, including racial slurs or microaggressions) (Williams & Mohammed, 2009).

These forms of discrimination are linked to serious physical and mental health issues, including higher mortality rates, hypertension, depression, anxiety, and psychological distress (Williams & Mohammed, 2013; Paradies, 2006). In healthcare settings, studies indicate that discrimination against racial/ethnic minorities and implicit biases among healthcare providers are widespread, negatively affecting the quality of healthcare delivery (Shavers et al., 2012; Stepanikova & Oates, 2017). Patients who experience or perceive discrimination are more likely to avoid seeking healthcare or delay essential medical treatment (Lewis et al., 2015). Nonetheless, additional research, particularly using national samples, is needed to better understand the full scope of discrimination's impact (Pascoe & Richman, 2009).

One effective medium for depicting and conveying messages about racism is film. As a cultural medium that can reach a wide audience, film has the ability to illustrate complex social dynamics, including issues related to racism. One of the films that was used as a platform to convey the message of racism is *12 Years a Slave* (2013). This film is based on the true story of an African-American man named Solomon Northup, who lived as a free man in 19th-century New York. The film portrays the painful experiences of Solomon Northup, a free Black man who was kidnapped and sold into slavery. Over the course of twelve years, he endured physical and mental suffering that reflected the brutality of the slave system. At the same time, the film highlights the resilience and struggle of individuals against injustice, as well as how humanity can persist even amid cruelty.

Films that explore racism can serve as a powerful medium for exploring societal issues, and when analyzed through a linguistic lens, they offer valuable insights into how language constructs, reinforces, or challenges social ideologies. According to Fairclough (1995), "language is not merely a neutral tool for communication; rather, it plays an active role in shaping and reinforcing social reality." In this sense, the attitude system, a key component of the appraisal framework in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), provides a useful approach for analyzing how attitudes are expressed in film dialogue, character interactions, and narrative structures. This system focuses on the emotional responses, judgments, and evaluations expressed in language, which can be crucial in understanding how racism is represented and confronted in films.

In the context of racism, films like *12 Years a Slave* portray characters struggling with systemic oppression and racial discrimination. By using the attitude system, researchers can analyze how language conveys the characters' emotional responses to their experiences, how they evaluate others based on race, and how attitudes of superiority or inferiority are embedded in speech. For example, in *12 Years a Slave*, the attitudes expressed by the white slave owners or other oppressive figures can be analyzed through negative judgment and affect, showing how racism is not only a societal structure but also an emotional and evaluative force. Meanwhile, the expressions of defiance or hope by the oppressed characters can be analyzed through positive affect and judgment, revealing their resistance to racial subjugation.

Research Questions

How does the Judgment System depict the microinsult strategy with the subcategory of assumption of criminal status in the movie *12 Years a Slave*?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Attitude System

Through the attitude system, the study of linguistic features such as modality, affective expressions, and evaluative language can uncover how racism is depicted through characters' attitudes, beliefs, and emotional states. As Martin and White (2005) note, "attitude involves our emotional response to people, events, and things, which often involves judgments and affect." This linguistic approach allows for a deeper understanding of the film's ideological

underpinnings, providing insights into how racism is not merely a visual representation, but also a complex interplay of attitudes and emotions conveyed through language. Thus, the combination of film analysis and the attitude system in linguistic research offers a comprehensive way to explore how media representations of racism influence and reflect societal attitudes, making it an effective tool for understanding the linguistic mechanisms that perpetuate or challenge racial ideologies.

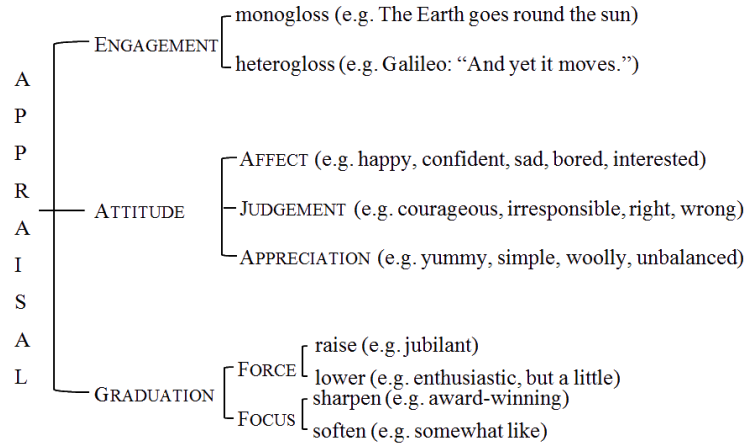


Figure 1. Appraisal Distribution

In analyzing language to depict the concept of microinsults, particularly the assumption of criminal status, the researchers have chosen to focus on the attitude system within the appraisal framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics. The Attitude system is essential for understanding how speakers or writers convey emotions, make judgments, and evaluate phenomena. By utilizing this system, we can delve deeper into how subtle, often implicit, negative evaluations are constructed in discourse. Specifically, the Attitude system helps reveal the underlying emotional stances, moral judgments, and evaluations that perpetuate microinsults in communication. The system is divided into three categories (Martin & Rose, 2007): affect, judgment, and appreciation, each of which plays a critical role in unpacking the assumption of criminal status as a microinsult.

Affect is relevant when microinsults elicit or reflect emotional responses, either from the speaker or the receiver. Then, judgment is central to analyzing how human behavior is evaluated according to social norms and moral codes. In the case of microinsults, the assumption of criminal status often involves negative judgments about an individual's integrity or trustworthiness. Appreciation comes into play when microinsults target objects, environments, or actions indirectly associated with the assumption of criminal status. For example, describing someone's clothing or mannerisms as "unusual" or "inappropriate" could subtly evaluate them as not conforming to societal expectations.

Attitude system is instrumental in uncovering how speakers or writers convey evaluations of emotions, behaviors, and phenomena. Specifically, to examine the assumption of criminal status, the focus is placed on the judgment category. Judgment evaluates human behavior in terms of social norms, ethical principles, and cultural expectations, making it highly relevant to uncovering the subtle ways microinsults operate in discourse (Martin & Rose, 2007).

SOCIAL ESTEEM 'venial'	positive [admire]	negative [criticize]
normality [fate] 'is s/he special?'	<i>lucky, fortunate, charmed... normal, average, everyday... in, fashionable, avant garde...</i>	<i>unfortunate, pitiful, tragic... odd, peculiar, eccentric... dated, daggy, retrograde...</i>
capacity 'is s/he capable?'	<i>powerful, vigorous, robust... insightful, clever, gifted... balanced, together, sane...</i>	<i>mild, weak, wimpy... slow, stupid, thick... flaky, neurotic, insane...</i>
tenacity [resolve] '*is s/he dependable?'	<i>plucky, brave, heroic... reliable, dependable... tireless, persevering, resolute...</i>	<i>rash, cowardly, despondent... unreliable, undependable... weak, distracted, dissolute...</i>
SOCIAL SANCTION 'moral'	positive [praise]	negative [condemn]
veracity [truth] 'is s/he honest?'	<i>truthful, honest, credible... sincere, genuine... frank, direct...</i>	<i>dishonest, deceitful... insincere, fake... deceptive, manipulative...</i>
propriety [ethics] 'is s/he beyond reproach?'	<i>good, moral, ethical... law-abiding, fair, just... sensitive, kind, caring...</i>	<i>bad, immoral, evil... corrupt, unfair, unjust... insensitive, mean, cruel...</i>

Figure 2. Judgment's Categorization

Judgment can be further divided into two main types: social esteem and social sanction (Martin & Rose, 2007). Social esteem involves evaluations related to an individual's capability, normality, or tenacity. For instance, assumptions like "You don't seem to belong here" may subtly question someone's normality or appropriateness, reflecting biases about who is perceived as fitting within societal spaces.

Social sanction pertains to moral evaluations of a person's behavior, such as judgments about their honesty or integrity. In the context of microinsults, the assumption of criminal status often involves negative moral judgments, as seen in statements like "Are you sure you're not doing anything illegal?" Such remarks implicitly position the individual as untrustworthy or morally suspect, perpetuating stereotypes tied to criminality.

By focusing on judgment, this analysis highlights how language encodes subtle but impactful evaluations of human behavior that reinforce prejudice and discrimination. It allows for a critical examination of the linguistic strategies that sustain societal biases, particularly in the context of microinsults and their implications for marginalized groups.

B. Racial Microaggression

In this study, the judgment system is used to depict the microinsult strategy under the subcategory of assumption of criminal status. This framework is derived from the theory of racial microaggressions. Microaggression refers to commonplace verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights toward people of color (Sue, 2010, p. 29). According to Harrison and Tanner (2018), there are three forms of microaggressions: (1) microassault, (2) microinsult, and (3) microinvalidation.

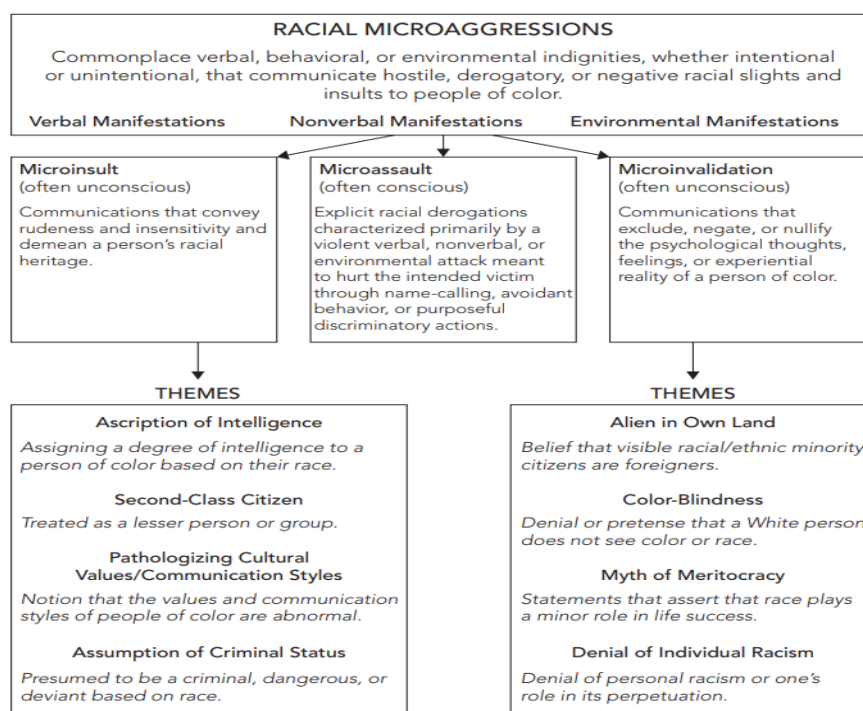


Figure 3. Types of Racial Microaggression

Based on the figure above, this research focuses solely on microinsult with the theme of assumption of criminal status. Assumption of criminal status refers to verbal microaggressions that perceive victims of racism as criminals and dangerous based on their race. In this context, the Black race is depicted as slaves in the film *12 Years a Slave*.

C. Previous Studies

Several studies on racism have been conducted by researchers from various countries. Many of these studies fall under the domain of critical discourse analysis with a focus on racism. Notable studies in this area include works by Breazu (2022), Salem et al. (2021), Adamu et al. (2019), Graber et al. (2019), Welsh et al. (2020), Khalifa (2017), Mahbub et al. (2020), Patton et al. (2017), Bridgeforth (2021), Litchmore et al. (2015), Briscoe and Khalifa (2015), Wu and Wall (2021), Al Ahmad and Awwad (2020), Farkas et al. (2018), Hughey and Daniels (2013), Trochmann et al. (2021), Naidu et al. (2023), Bates (2023), Kadim (2022), Shukry (2013), Muller (2021), Sengul (2019), Wang and Catalano (2023), Ali Afkhami et al. (2018), McGannon and Butryn (2020), and Civila et al. (2020). None of these studies, however, use film as their research medium. The settings for these studies include novels, news, speeches, online media, and fieldwork. For example, fieldwork studies have been conducted by Briscoe and Khalifa (2015), Naidu et al. (2023), Bates (2023), Trochmann et al. (2021), Adamu et al. (2019), Welsh et al. (2020), Bridgeforth (2021), and Litchmore et al. (2015). Novel-based research includes works by Al Mamoori et al. (2021), Khalifa (2017), and Mahbub et al. (2020). Speech-based studies include McGannon and Butryn (2020), Kadim (2022), Shukry (2013),

Ali Afkhami et al. (2018), Sengul (2019), and Salem et al. (2021). News-based research includes Lopez (2020), Reitmanova et al. (2023), Al Ahmad and Awwad (2020), Serafis et al. (2020), Breazu (2022), and Graber et al. (2019). Online media studies include Indrawati (2021), Muller (2021), Wang and Catalano (2023), Wu and Wall (2021), Civila et al. (2020), Farkas et al. (2018), and Patton et al. (2017).

The difference between these previous studies and the current research design lies in the use of an SFL approach, particularly focusing on the appraisal system, with an emphasis on the attitude subsystem as an analytical tool. Among the previous studies, none specifically used the appraisal system to explore the racism strategy based on the racial microaggression theory, especially the microinsult. By using the judgment system of attitude element, this research investigates how antagonist characters express the microinsult strategy of assumption of criminal status for attacking the protagonist characters. Thus, the research problems in this study are as follows:

How does the judgment system depict the microinsult strategy with the subcategory of assumption of criminal status in the movie *12 Years a Slave*?

III. METHODOLOGY

The primary aim of this study is to analyze the judgment system within the appraisal framework to explore how it represents the microinsult strategy under the subcategory of assumption of criminal status in the movie *12 Years a Slave*. To achieve these objectives, the study adopted a qualitative research design with a focus on SFL, particularly the appraisal framework, as proposed by Martin and Rose (2007). This approach is suitable for examining how language constructs meaning in social and cultural contexts and for analyzing the role of judgment in expressing implicit biases and social dynamics.

The research primarily focuses on the movie *12 Years a Slave* as its data source. This film, which depicts the harrowing journey of Solomon Northup, provides a rich context for analyzing utterances laden with judgments and microinsults, particularly those that align with the theme of criminalization. The narrative stages of the movie such as orientation, complication, and resolution serve as the framework for examining judgment instances. This aligns with Santosa's (2021) concept of research locations encompassing settings, participants, and events as the larger social structures.

The study employed purposive sampling, focusing on specific scenes in *12 Years a Slave* where judgment and microinsults are prominently featured. Purposive sampling ensured that only relevant data consistent with the research objectives were included, following the recommendations of Teddlie and Yu (2007). To triangulate findings, the study incorporated document analysis of the movie script and a focus group discussion (FGD) conducted in 2024 at the Descriptive Linguistics Department of Universitas Sebelas Maret. This FGD involved experts in linguistics and film studies, who provided qualitative insights into the interplay between language and discrimination in the film.

In terms of analysis, the study applied Spradley's (2016) ethnographic analysis method, encompassing domain, taxonomy, componential, and cultural theme analysis. This methodology was designed to uncover the cultural and linguistic nuances embedded in the narrative, emphasizing how judgment constructs meaning and conveys implicit social biases. By exploring these themes, the study aims to reveal the strategies used to represent microinsults in the film and their broader implications for understanding societal prejudice.

IV. RESULTS

This section discusses the results in relation to the research questions, focusing on how the judgment system within the appraisal framework is employed to depict microinsults, specifically those associated with the assumption of criminal status. The analysis highlights the linguistic strategies used to embed microinsults in dialogue and narrative, offering insights into how these strategies contribute to the portrayal of systemic prejudice. Additionally, the section explores the broader implications of these linguistic choices for character development and audience perception of societal biases.

How Does the Judgment System within the Appraisal Framework Depict the Microinsult Strategy Categorized as Assumption of Criminal Status in *12 Years a Slave*?

The judgment system provides a comprehensive tool for analyzing how evaluative language operates to portray such microinsults, focusing on attitudes and moral assessments directed towards individuals. This analysis aims to reveal how linguistic elements are utilized to reinforce discriminatory stereotypes and contribute to character portrayal and narrative progression.

The distribution of the judgment system, including its categories and frequency in depicting microinsults in the movie, is presented in the table below.

TABLE 1
COMPONENTIAL TABLE

STAGES	MICROINSULT	JUDGMENT'S CATEGORIES				
		SOC			SAC	
		Nor	Cap	Ten	Ver	Pro
ORIENTATION	Assumption of Criminal Status	1				1
COMPLICATION	Assumption of Criminal Status		10	3	7	7
RESOLUTION	Assumption of Criminal Status	1				15
TOTAL		2	10	3	7	23

Note:

SOC: Social Esteem

SAC: Social Sanction

Nor: Normality

Cap: Capacity

Ten: Tenacity

Ver: Veracity

Pro: Propriety

The table above illustrates the distribution of judgment categories that realized *microinsult: assumption of criminal status* occurring across the different stages of the narrative (Orientation, Complication, and Resolution). Within the judgment categories (*SOC* as Social Esteem and *SAC* as Social Sanction), there is further breakdown into subcategories including *Nor*=Normality, *Cap*=Capacity, and *Ten*=Tenacity, for Social Esteem, and *Ver*=Veracity, and *Pro*=Propriety for Social Sanction. The data reveal that the Complication stage exhibits a substantially higher frequency of microinsults. These instances are distributed across both domains of judgment: within Social Esteem (SOC), manifesting as judgments of Normality (1), Capacity (10), and Tenacity (3), and within Social Sanction (SAC), evident as judgments of Veracity (7) and Propriety (7). Conversely, the Orientation and Resolution stages demonstrate a comparatively lower incidence of microinsults. In these stages, the phenomenon is predominantly concentrated within the Propriety (SAC) subcategory, a finding underscored by the prominent count of 15 instances in the Resolution stage.

A. Judgment's Category of Social Esteem: Normality to Portray Microinsults With the Theme of Assumption of Criminal Status

DATA (1) Judgment: Social Esteem: Normality

"Shackle my niggers. Get them to my cart."

The excerpt above is found in the "Orientation" stage. It depicts a case of racism categorized as a microinsult with the theme of assumption of criminal status. This racist expression was uttered by slave traders to their slaves. The clause also labels the slaves as if they were criminals. The phrase directly portrays the slaves with their hands shackled, resembling the treatment of criminals. This data is also categorized under *Judgment: Social Sanction: Propriety*. The clause "Shackle my niggers" represents an evaluation directed at the slaves in the film. Furthermore, from the perspective of *Normality*, the clause seems to depict the perceived destiny of all Black people, who are assumed and labeled as slaves.

DATA (2) Judgment: Social Esteem: Normality: Negative

Context: Epps raises his whip again. The whip quivers in his hand, ready to be used... but he cannot bring himself to strike. He then turns to Solomon and hands him the whip. Solomon hesitates to swing the whip handed to him. However, Epps keeps insisting that Solomon do it until Solomon has no choice but to comply.

Mr. Epps: "You will strike her until her flesh is rent, and meat and blood flow equal."

In Mr. Epps's utterance, "meat and blood flow equal," elements of racism are reflected in the form of *Microinsult: Assumption of Criminal Status*. This statement places Solomon in a position where he is deemed incapable of controlling his actions, as though inherently, as a Black slave, he is seen as someone prone to violence or brutality without reflection. This utterance dehumanizes Solomon by reducing him to a tool for inflicting pain, disregarding his humanity entirely.

This statement also aligns with *Judgment: Social Esteem: Normality: Negative*. Epps implies that Solomon, as a slave, lacks the behaviors or traits that conform to the accepted human standards of society. By forcing Solomon to inflict violence on Patsey to the point of severe injury, Epps regards such an action as something acceptable and expected from a slave. Conversely, social norms governing human rights and dignity are disregarded, and Solomon, as a slave, is compelled to act against the moral principles that should apply to every individual. In Epps's view, these principles are not expected of a slave.

B. Judgment's Category of Social Esteem: Capacity to Portray Microinsults With the Theme of Assumption of Criminal Status

DATA (3) Judgment: Social Esteem: Capacity

Context: Tibbeats sings a mocking song to the slaves, repeating it as they work in the field.

Tibeats: "Nigger run, run so fast."

The phrase "nigger run, run so fast," sung by Tibeats in this context, carries profound meaning related to *Microinsult: Assumption of Criminal Status* and *Judgment: Social Esteem: Capacity*. Specifically, this phrase reflects the stereotypical assumption that Black people, in this case, slaves, are constantly seen as threats or criminals. The deliberate use of the word "nigger" dehumanizes individuals based on their race, associating them with behaviors perceived as dangerous or criminal. By saying "run so fast," Tibeats implies that the slaves are always in a position to flee, portraying fear and distrust, reinforcing the stereotype that Black individuals are threats to be feared.

In relation to *Judgment: Social Esteem: Capacity*, this phrase underscores the low social regard for the slaves. Tibeats not only views them as objects meant to labor without rights but also degrades their value and dignity as individuals. "Run so fast" is not merely a physical command but also a reflection of the belief that the slaves lack equal social capacity and are only seen as entities to be exploited or ridiculed. These two aspects are interconnected, as the criminal assumptions imposed upon individuals reflect a reduction in their social capacity, reinforcing the notion that Black individuals are undeserving of higher levels of dignity within the social structure.

DATA (4) Judgment: Social Esteem: Capacity

Context: Tibeats sings a mocking song to the slaves, repeating it as they work in the field.

Tibeats: "Nigger run through the field."

The phrase "nigger run through the field," sung by Tibeats in this context, conveys *Microinsult: Assumption of Criminal Status* and *Judgment: Social Esteem: Capacity*, highlighting racial discrimination and the degradation of the slaves' dignity. In this case, the use of the word "run" can be interpreted as a representation of the need to flee or avoid danger, which is often associated with criminal or threatening behavior. Through this mocking song, Tibeats implies that the slaves are perpetually seen as being in a precarious position, as though they lack freedom or the right to live without fear, instead being viewed as individuals who must constantly be warned or ordered to "run." This reinforces the stereotype that Black individuals, particularly slaves, are always associated with criminal status or danger, even when performing mundane tasks like working in the field.

From the perspective of *Judgment: Social Esteem: Capacity*, the phrase also illustrates the low social value attributed to the slaves. Tibeats's mocking song, with the words "run through the field," not only devalues their physical abilities but also diminishes their social capacity as individuals entitled to dignity and equal rights. In essence, the slaves are viewed as nothing more than objects to be exploited and ridiculed, without any acknowledgment of their humanity. These two concepts are interrelated, as the criminal assumptions imposed upon Black individuals directly contribute to the reduced social capacity assigned to them, illustrating how slavery not only led to physical exploitation but also to the denigration of the slaves' social identity and dignity.

The occurrences of *Judgment: Social Esteem: Capacity* in the film *12 Years a Slave* are only found in the scenes where Tibeats sings mocking songs to the slaves, specifically during the "Complication" stage.

C. Judgment's Category of Social Esteem: Tenacity to Portray Microinsults With the Theme of Assumption of Criminal Status

DATA (5) Judgment: Social Esteem: Tenacity

Context: Tibeats sings a mocking song to the slaves, repeating it while they work in the field.

Tibeats: Stoved his head in a hornet's nest.

This utterance conveys mockery or disdain toward an individual by portraying their actions as exceedingly foolish or reckless. The phrase implies that the person has done something profoundly detrimental or disruptive, akin to absurdly provoking a situation full of danger or conflict. Such language not only degrades the individual but also pathologizes their behavior, portraying it as intrinsically flawed or irrational within the dominant group's norms. Additionally, it shows cultural bias by deeming the behaviors or lifestyles of Black individuals as inappropriate or problematic, labeling them as poor or unwise decision-makers.

Linguistically, this utterance corresponds to *Judgment: Social Esteem: Tenacity*. Tenacity refers to an individual's capacity to resolve problems. In this context, the utterance conveys a negative evaluation of the individual's ability to handle situations wisely. The phrase assesses the individual's actions as not only reckless but also indicative of a lack of resilience or competence in dealing with issues effectively.

D. Judgment's Category of Social Sanction: Veracity to Portray Microinsults With the Theme of Assumption of Criminal Status

DATA (6) Judgment: Social Sanction: Veracity

Tibeats: Goddamn you! I thought you knewed something!

Analyzing this utterance, the clause "you knewed something" must be understood in the context of the preceding expression of anger and frustration. In this context, the clause can be categorized as a *Microinsult: Assumption of Criminal Status*, as it implies a negative assumption about the knowledge or competence of the person being addressed. Additionally, the clause is connected to *Judgment: Social Sanction: Veracity*, which evaluates the truthfulness or accuracy of an individual's knowledge. By expressing disappointment over the expectation that the person should have possessed certain knowledge, the utterance implies social sanction against the validity or reliability of the individual's understanding.

DATA (7) Judgment: Social Sanction: Veracity

Tibeats: One had a rope and it was hung around his neck.

This phrase implicitly assumes that the individual described is involved in criminal or dangerous activities, suggesting that they have been punished or subjected to extreme measures. Within the context of *Microinsult: Assumption of Criminal Status*, the utterance demonstrates how individuals from certain groups can be prejudicially viewed as engaging in unlawful or undesirable behavior, as implied by the negative connotations of the action described.

In terms of *Judgment: Social Sanction: Veracity*, the statement reflects an evaluation of the accuracy or legitimacy of these assumptions within the social framework. By depicting the individual in a derogatory and demeaning manner, the utterance reinforces the perception that extreme actions or violence inflicted upon them might be seen as justified or in line with societal expectations, despite actually being forms of stigmatization.

E. Judgment's Category of Social Sanction: Propriety to Portray Microinsults With the Theme of Assumption of Criminal Status

DATA (8) Judgment: Social Sanction: propriety: Negative

Context: Epps raised his whip again. The whip quivered in his hand, ready to be used. Yet, he couldn't bring himself to strike. He then turned to Solomon and handed the whip to him. Solomon hesitated to swing the whip that was given to him. However, Epps insisted that Solomon comply, leaving him with no other choice. Finally, Mr. Epps issued a grave threat to Solomon, stating that if Solomon refused, he would kill every slave present.

Mr. Epps: *Or I will kill every nigger in my sight!*

In Mr. Epps' utterance, "*I will kill every nigger in my sight!*", there is a clear indication of racism through *Microinsult: Assumption of Criminal Status*. The statement assumes that Solomon, like the other slaves, is viewed more as an object or tool subject to Epps' power, devoid of any rights to defend himself or resist the orders. In this context, Epps portrays Solomon and the other slaves as inherently linked to violence or as threats to white people. This conveys a degrading perception, implying that Black individuals, as slaves, lack recognized moral capacity or self-control within society, and as a result, can be arbitrarily threatened or punished.

The statement also relates to *Judgment: Social Sanction: Propriety: Negative*, indicating that the behavior imposed on Solomon—whipping Patsey—is deemed legitimate by Epps within the context of his social norms, even though it violates universal moral standards. Solomon is forced to commit violence against Patsey because Patsey is accused of breaking plantation rules, such as leaving without Epps' permission. From Epps' perspective, this violation warrants severe punishment, which he views as justifiable and appropriate, even though it is clearly immoral and unacceptable in broader societal terms. Epps' threat to kill the slaves underscores his belief in his absolute authority to inflict cruel punishments without regard for the rights or dignity of the enslaved.

DATA (9) Judgment: Social Sanction: Propriety: Negative

Context: Epps raised his whip high, ready to strike Patsey. However, despite his burning rage, he couldn't bring himself to deliver the blow. He then turned to Mrs. Epps, who stood proudly, urging him to proceed.

Mrs. Epps: *Strike the life from her!*

At the resolution stage of this conflict, Mrs. Epps' statement, "*Strike the life from her!*", illustrates an extreme form of racism, openly desiring and encouraging violence against the enslaved Patsey. This statement demonstrates *Microinsult: Assumption of Criminal Status*, treating Patsey as inherently guilty or deserving of severe punishment, even to the point of losing her life.

On a broader level, this command represents *Judgment: Social Sanction: Propriety: Negative*, wherein such acts of violence are not only considered acceptable but justified under the prevailing racist social norms of the environment. Mrs. Epps, as the "appraiser," directs her negative judgment toward Patsey, no longer viewing her as a human being with the right to life, but as someone unworthy of respect or protection. This underscores Patsey's position as a second-class individual, tragically illustrating the depth of racism that normalized hatred and violence within that society.

V. DISCUSSION

The results of this analysis demonstrate how the microinsults linked to the assumption of criminal status, categorized under *Judgment: Social Esteem: Normality*, successfully depict the dehumanization of marginalized individuals. Phrases such as "Shackle my niggers" and "Get them to my cart" are indicative of racial stereotypes that perpetuate the belief that Black people are inherently criminal. These expressions normalize their subjugation, reducing their humanity and reinforcing structural injustices. As exemplified in the dialogue of Epps, "You will strike her until her flesh is rent," the cruelty towards Black slaves is framed as a natural trait, reinforcing the assumption that Black people are predisposed to violence or deserving of harsh punishment. This is in line with Sue et al. (2019), who highlight how microinsults perpetuate systemic racism through subtle, everyday language. However, this study distinguishes itself by showing how these racial presumptions were historically normalized through overt language and institutional behaviour, whereas Sue et al. focus on contemporary settings. Similarly, Young (2018) discusses the role of language in reinforcing stereotypes, adding to the body of literature by examining the mechanisms through which marginalized groups are portrayed as inferior in historical contexts, such as slavery. This analysis highlights the role of microinsults in perpetuating racial hierarchies by presenting marginalized individuals as abnormal or inherently criminal.

Further examination of *Judgment: Social Esteem: Capacity* reveals how microinsults related to the assumption of criminal status serve to devalue marginalized people by framing them as lacking moral capacity. For example, Tibeats's mocking lines, "nigger run, run so fast" and "nigger run through the field," stereotype Black people as inherently criminal and as fugitives, reinforcing the narrative that they are a constant societal threat. This linguistic representation diminishes their perceived social worth, framing them as morally and socially inferior. These findings align with the Appraisal Theory of Martin and Rose (2007), which explores how language shapes social evaluations and attitudes. By applying this framework to historical settings, this study demonstrates how language was historically weaponized to uphold systemic injustice. Smith et al. (2012) support this, emphasizing the role of linguistic presumptions in marginalizing racial minorities, thus reinforcing their dehumanization and societal exclusion.

Moreover, the analysis of *Judgment: Social Esteem: Tenacity* reveals how the linguistic portrayal of Black people as defective and incapable of wise decision-making perpetuates microinsults related to criminality. Tibeats's sarcastic remark, "stoved his head in a hornet's nest," implies that Black slaves lack resilience and sound judgment, reinforcing the stereotype that they are incapable of making rational decisions. This analysis resonates with Risdianto (2024), who explores how language in political biographies either enhances or undermines public perceptions of perseverance. Similar to Cahyono (2024), who examines how language in biographies shapes stories of resilience, this study highlights the role of judgmental language in perpetuating systemic prejudice, both historically and socially.

The examination of *Judgment: Social Sanction: Veracity* shows how the assumption of criminal status is linked to perceptions of untrustworthiness and dishonesty. Tibeats's contemptuous remark, "Goddamn you! I thought you knew something," challenges the credibility of Black slaves, further reinforcing their perceived inferiority. Additionally, the statement "One had a rope and it was hung around his neck" depicts societal norms that legitimize harsh punishment and implicitly assume wrongdoing. This ties into Risdianto's (2024) work on how language in state relocation news undermines the legitimacy of marginalized viewpoints, as well as Faqiyah's (2022) study on how biased appraisals of trustworthiness are shaped by gender. Both studies reveal how microinsults contribute to systemic discrimination by delegitimizing marginalized groups based on racial presumptions of criminality and untrustworthiness.

Finally, the study on *Judgment: Social Sanction: Propriety: Negative* demonstrates how racialized presumptions within the assumption of criminal status shape harsh and violent treatment. Mr. Epps's declaration, "I will kill every nigger in my sight!" and Mrs. Epps's command, "Strike the life from her!" frame the torture and death of Black slaves as acceptable, further normalizing the idea that Black people deserve violent punishment. This parallels Utami's (2023) examination of news coverage on Reynhard Sinaga, where language framed him not only as a criminal but as the embodiment of criminality itself. Both cases illustrate how microinsults are used to uphold societal norms that justify systemic injustice against marginalized individuals, particularly in relation to racialized presumptions of criminality.

VI. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study, grounded in Martin and White's appraisal framework and a narrative structural model, reveal the intricate ways in which linguistic strategies, particularly the judgment system, are employed in the film *12 Years a Slave* to construct and perpetuate microinsults categorized under the assumption of criminal status. From the analysis, it is evident that these microinsults are distributed unevenly across the narrative stages—Orientation, Complication, and Resolution. The Complication stage emerges as the most dominant, containing the highest number of microinsults (23 instances), with diverse representation across judgment categories. In contrast, the Orientation and Resolution stages feature relatively fewer instances, indicating that the Complication stage serves as a focal point for exposing systemic prejudice through evaluative language.

The findings further reveal that different categories within the judgment system contribute to the construction of microinsults. For instance, under Social Esteem - Normality, two instances explicitly label Black characters as inherently criminal, as seen in dehumanizing commands like "Shackle my niggers," portraying slavery as a normalized condition for Black individuals. Similarly, under Social Esteem - Capacity, three instances center on Tibeats' mocking songs, such as "Nigger run, run so fast," which perpetuate stereotypes of Black individuals as fugitives or criminals. Additionally, Social Esteem - Tenacity accounts for three instances of mockery targeting perseverance and determination, while Social Sanction - Propriety dominates the analysis with 15 instances, highlighting moral assessments of enslaved individuals, such as Epps forcing Solomon to whip Patsey.

The dominance of Propriety judgments underscores the moral dimension of systemic racism as portrayed in the film, revealing how characters are evaluated based on dehumanizing stereotypes and societal biases. Furthermore, the narrative stages reflect distinct linguistic patterns. The Orientation stage introduces microinsults minimally, setting the groundwork for systemic bias. The Complication stage, as the narrative's climax, amplifies the linguistic embedding of microinsults, intensifying the portrayal of societal prejudice. Finally, the Resolution stage consolidates these prejudices, illustrating their lasting implications for the characters' fates.

In sum, this study provides a nuanced understanding of how systemic prejudice is linguistically constructed in cinematic narratives. By analyzing the interplay between micro-level language choices and macro-level narrative strategies, the research underscores the critical role of film as a medium for reflecting and challenging societal biases. It also highlights the utility of the judgment system as an analytical tool for uncovering the subtle yet pervasive ways in which language can perpetuate stereotypes and systemic discrimination.

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