AN ANALYSIS OF BACKCHANNELS USED BY BARBIE IN GRETA GERWIG'S MOVIE ENTITLED BARBIE

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***Abstract**: Backchannels are usually employed to convey feedback from the addressee during conversations. When one person speaks at length, listeners often respond with brief replies to demonstrate engagement and understanding. The prevalence and accessibility of backchannels have increased significantly over time, allowing a wide range of individuals to encounter and use them in various contexts effortlessly. This study analyzes the types of backchannels that are used by Barbie in Greta Gerwig's Movie entitled Barbie. The research is using a qualitative method, the researcher collecting the data through the utterances of the main character in the movie. The total of 94 data from the total runtime of two hours of the movie is showing Verbal Backchannels type is the most showing type, representing 67 times (71%) of the total number of backchannels occurrences. While the less showing type is Nonverbal Backchannels, representing 27 times (29%) of the total number of backchannels occurrences. These findings are imperative for educators to comprehend the use of backchannels—such as "uhm", "yeah" or "huh?"— in order to provide language teaching. When being used appropriately, backchannels can serve as a valuable tool to enhance student learning and facilitate more effective teaching practices. By broadening their understanding of backchannels, students can enrich their knowledge of English and enhance their communication skills.*

***Key Words:** Analysis, Backchannels, Barbie Movie.*

ANALISIS BACKCHANNELS YANG DIGUNAKAN BARBIE DALAM FILM GRETA GERWIG YANG BERJUDUL BARBIE

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Abstrak: Umpan balik biasanya digunakan untuk menyampaikan umpan balik dari penerima pesan selama percakapan. Ketika seseorang berbicara panjang lebar, pendengar sering merespons dengan balasan singkat untuk menunjukkan keterlibatan dan pemahaman. Prevalensi dan aksesibilitas umpan balik telah meningkat secara signifikan dari waktu ke waktu, memungkinkan berbagai individu untuk mengalaminya dan menggunakannya dalam berbagai konteks dengan mudah. Penelitian ini menganalisis jenis-jenis tanggapan balik yang digunakan oleh Barbie dalam film Greta Gerwig yang berjudul Barbie. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif, peneliti mengumpulkan data melalui ucapan karakter utama dalam film. Dari total 94 data selama dua jam durasi film, menunjukkan bahwa jenis Umpan Balik Verbal adalah yang paling sering muncul, yaitu sebanyak 67 kali (71%) dari total kemunculan umpan balik. Sedangkan jenis yang paling sedikit muncul adalah Umpan Balik Nonverbal, yaitu sebanyak 27 kali (29%) dari total kemunculan umpan balik. Temuan ini penting bagi para pendidik untuk memahami penggunaan umpan balik—seperti "uhm", "yeah" atau "huh?"—untuk memberikan pengajaran bahasa. Ketika digunakan dengan tepat, umpan balik dapat menjadi alat yang berharga untuk meningkatkan pembelajaran siswa dan memfasilitasi praktik pengajaran yang lebih efektif. Dengan memperluas pemahaman mereka tentang umpan balik, siswa dapat memperkaya pengetahuan mereka tentang bahasa Inggris dan meningkatkan keterampilan komunikasi mereka.

Kata Kunci: Analisa, Umpan Balik (Backchannels), Film Barbie.

INTRODUCTION

Language serves as a vital tool for human communication, enabling the exchange of messages and intentions, thereby facilitating understanding among individuals. Lynch (2000) asserts that language allows us to share information ranging from simple directions to complex ideas and is essential for communication, cognition, and social interaction. Chaer (2009) highlights that language is inseparable from human existence, permeating all facets of life and fostering social interactions by enabling individuals to exchange thoughts and perspectives. Additionally, language comprises not only verbal elements but also nonverbal cues such as facial expressions, gestures, and tone of voice, which are integral to effective communication. Jakobson (1960) describes language as a structured system governed by specific rules, utilizing sounds or gestures to convey meanings comprehensible to its users. Holmes (2003) further emphasizes that language constructs and negotiates social meanings, identities, and relationships, thus serving as a unifying force that connects individuals and forms the foundation for meaningful conversations.

Conversation, defined as the exchange of words between people who take turns speaking and listening (Tannen, 1990), plays a crucial role in human interaction. It serves multiple purposes, including conveying information, expressing emotions, negotiating meanings, and building relationships. Schegloff (2007) argues that conversation follows specific rules and occurs in a certain order, facilitating mutual understanding through structured interaction. Heritage (1997) views conversation as a social activity influenced by cultural norms, where participants collaboratively make sense of their interactions. In conversations, speakers and listeners engage by sharing information, thoughts, and opinions while trying to understand and consider each other's perspectives. This engagement often includes backchannels—gestures such as nodding or verbal affirmations like "uh-huh"—that signal active listening and understanding without interrupting the speaker.

Sociolinguistics examines the relationship between language and society, analyzing how various social factors influence language use (Labov, 1972). This field explores how different groups utilize language, including backchanneling, and considers factors like gender, age, ethnicity, and social status (Holmes & Meyerhoff, 2003). Researchers in sociolinguistics might investigate how backchannel signals vary across social contexts or demographic groups. Eckert (2018) discusses how language reflects and affects social power and identity. By studying attitudes, rules, and beliefs about language, sociolinguistics provides insights into cultural diversity, power dynamics, and interpersonal interactions. This understanding helps explain how people communicate and interact in various social situations.

Backchannels are brief responses from listeners during conversations, signaling engagement and understanding. Yule (1996) describes these cues as verbal signs of attentiveness, such as "um," "huh," "hmm," and "yes," which occur while the speaker is talking. These signals, including verbal affirmations like "uh-huh" and nonverbal cues like head nods, indicate the listener's comprehension and active participation. Yngve (1970) characterizes backchannels as short, frequent vocalizations that do not interrupt the speaker. Clark and Brennan (1991) define backchannels as signals from listeners that confirm their understanding of the speaker's message, fostering effective communication and mutual understanding.

The use of backchannels has gained attention in understanding dialogue in movies,

reflecting natural conversational patterns and enhancing realism. Garcia et al. (2019) note that backchannels in movies, such as in Greta Gerwig's *Barbie* (2023), portray realistic interactions and enhance character development. Analyzing backchannels in movies can provide valuable insights into conversational norms and cues, which is crucial for language education. Wang and Yang (2020) argue that incorporating backchanneling techniques into language lessons enhances conversational skills, turn-taking, and active listening. Movies like *Barbie* offer practical examples of effective communication strategies, helping students understand cultural nuances and improve their conversational competence. This approach fosters a more interactive and inclusive learning environment, encouraging active student engagement and reducing anxiety in language learning contexts.

Based on the explanation above, the researcher is interested in conducting a research entitled An Analysis of Backchannels Used by Barbie in Greta Gerwig's Movie entitled *Barbie*.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employed a descriptive qualitative approach, as outlined by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), given the emphasis on observing the phenomenon. This approach aims to provide a comprehensive summary of specific events experienced by individuals or groups, emphasizing the thorough investigation and comprehension of social phenomena in their authentic settings. This methodology involves gathering and analyzing non-numeric data, including verbal expressions, visual materials, and observations, with a focus on producing detailed, descriptive results and revealing implicit significance and recurring structures. Conducted from February to June 2024 at the English Study Program of Universitas Riau, the research comprised three stages: preparation, implementation, and reporting. The primary data source was Greta Gerwig's movie entitled *Barbie* (2023). with research data consisting of dialogues exchanged between Barbie and other characters. Subtitles provided by the streaming service were also consulted to verify the accuracy of the transcribed utterances.

The core data collection methods included observation and documentation. The researcher watched the Barbie movie (2023) multiple times on HBO GO, a legitimate subscription-based streaming platform, to gather detailed information. During the screenings, the researcher focused on Barbie's interactions, discerning and documenting all utterances where she employed backchannels, as defined by Yule (1996). These instances were compiled into an observational record presented in tabular format, including timestamps, utterances, and categorizations of backchannel types. The research instruments included audiovisual materials, the movie script, and tools such as a laptop, headset, book, and pen. The analysis process involved identifying and categorizing backchannels within Barbie's utterances, organizing data into an observational table using Google Sheets, and employing thematic analysis to uncover patterns and themes. Thematic analysis, as explained by Braun and Clarke (2019), involves a step-by-step process of coding data to organize and describe it in detail, identifying how backchannels aid communication, reveal power dynamics, and contribute to character development.

Following data collection and analysis, conclusions were drawn by synthesizing the collected data into meaningful patterns and insights, as suggested by Silverman (2015). The researcher provided a detailed descriptive analysis of the findings, highlighting examples of the various types of backchannels used by Barbie in the movie. The context and usage of each backchannel type were interpreted to draw comprehensive conclusions about their function and

significance. To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, a triangulation technique was employed, consulting three experts who are lecturers with master's degrees and at least three years of teaching experience. This triangulation process helped verify the accuracy and consistency of the findings, thereby enhancing the credibility of the research conclusions. This rigorous methodological approach ensured a thorough and nuanced understanding of the role of backchannels in the Barbie movie, contributing valuable insights to the study of language and communication in media.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The data that the writer collected from the Barbie movie (2023) reveal that Barbie (portrayed by Margot Robbie) employed backchannels 94 times throughout her dialogue. According to Yule's (1996) classification, these backchannels are divided into two types: verbal and nonverbal. The findings show that verbal backchannels were used 67 times (71%), while nonverbal backchannels appeared 27 times (29%).

Table 1. Backchannel's Types Used by Barbie

No.	Backchannels' Types	Number of Occurrences	Percentages (%)
1.	Verbal backchannels	67	71
2.	Nonverbal backchannels	27	29
TOTAL		**94**	**100**

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1.) Verbal Backchannels

Verbal backchannels are brief vocal responses that indicate a listener's attentiveness and encouragement for the speaker to continue (Yule, 1996). In the Barbie screenplay, Barbie frequently uses verbal backchannels, highlighting their importance in maintaining conversational flow and engagement. Examples from the script include phrases like "Yeah," "I'm so...," "What? No, I'm just, am I?," and "Ugh." These expressions serve various functions: acknowledging and confirming agreement, signaling hesitation, seeking confirmation, and expressing emotional reactions. For instance, Barbie's use of "Yeah" in response to an inquiry acknowledges and confirms agreement, maintaining the flow of conversation. Similarly, "I'm so... embarrassed" demonstrates a hesitation marker, signaling a momentary pause and reflection on her emotional state. These verbal backchannels facilitate dynamic interactions by providing immediate feedback and maintaining engagement.

2.) Nonverbal Backchannels

Nonverbal backchannels include gestures, facial expressions, and other body language cues that demonstrate engagement and attentiveness without speaking (Yule, 1996). In Barbie's interactions, nonverbal cues such as head nods, eye contact, and facial expressions play a significant role in enhancing communication. For example, a “smiling sweetly” gesture indicates friendliness and engagement, while the “panic in her eyes” communicates confusion and discomfort. These nonverbal signals provide immediate feedback, helping to maintain conversational flow and express emotions without verbal interruptions. They align with Yule’s theory by contributing to the dynamics of the interaction, offering visual signals of Barbie’s thoughts and emotions, and facilitating smoother communication.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion

This research examined the use of backchannels in Greta Gerwig’s movie entitled *Barbie,* specifically analyzing Barbie's (Margot Robbie) utterances through the lens of Yule’s (1996) theory. The research identified both verbal and nonverbal backchannels, with a total of 94 instances recorded. Verbal backchannels were the most frequently used, indicating their significant role in maintaining conversational flow and engagement, while nonverbal backchannels also played a crucial role in expressing emotions and providing visual feedback.

Recommendation

This research underscores the importance of understanding verbal and nonverbal backchannels in communication, particularly in media representations. Educators and learners should recognize how these elements contribute to effective dialogue and interaction in movie, reflecting broader conversational norms and dynamics. By appreciating these linguistic nuances, one can better understand the impact of dialogue on audience perception. Future research should explore backchannels in diverse contexts, considering factors like culture, social status, and age, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of conversational behaviors. Additionally, comparative studies of backchannels usage among different characters in *Barbie* (2023) or other movies could provide deeper insights into character development and interaction dynamics, enriching the literature on backchannels and media discourse.

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