

**THE PORTRAYAL OF RELIGIOUS IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION
THROUGH LANGUAGE FOUND IN *MS MARVEL* (2022)**

A GRADUATING PAPER

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of The Requirements for Gaining
the Bachelor's Degree in English Literature



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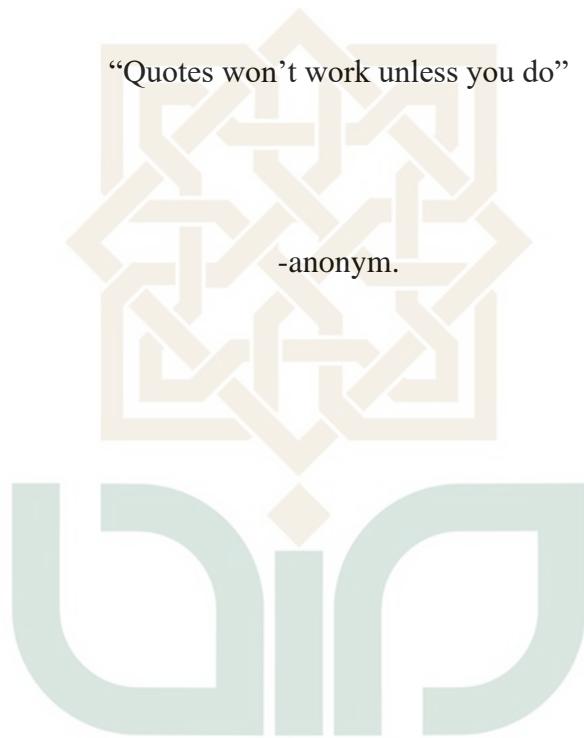
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MOTTO

“Inspired to be fear of being averaged”

“Quotes won’t work unless you do”

-anonym.



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DEDICATION

With all my heart, I dedicated my thesis to my parents and my sister.

Thank you for being there, believing and supporting me always.

My love for you is endless.

And to myself—hey, you did it! Thank you for hanging a little longer.



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kami menyatakan bahwa skripsi tersebut sudah dapat diajukan pada sidang Munaqosyah untuk memenuhi salah satu syarat memperoleh gelar Sarjana Sastra Inggris.

Atas perhatiannya, kami mengucapkan terima kasih.

Wassalamu'alaikum Wr. Wb

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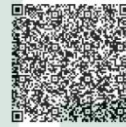
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FINAL PROJECT STATEMENT

FINAL PROJECT STATEMENT

I declare that I accept complete responsibility for the authenticity of this thesis. Everything included in this thesis is wholly my responsibilities. My viewpoints or findings of the other researcher included in this thesis have been cited in accordance with ethical standards.

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The Portrayal of Religious Identity Construction through Language Found in *Ms Marvel* (2022)

By: Naufal Ridho

ABSTRACT

Language is very influential in shaping identity. Identity is a social code owned by each individual. This can be observed from the language they use and refer to certain groups. This research discusses how the construction of religious identity is formed through the language used by Kamala Khan in the Ms. Marvel series (2022). The problem raised in this research is the main character who explains things that refer to religion only by using religious terms to both Muslim and non-Muslim colleagues, which sometimes makes the speaking partner confused, especially the non-Muslim colleagues since they are unfamiliar with the religious term Kamala used. The method used in this research is qualitative descriptive. This study aims to illustrate and show how a person's religious identity can be formed and seen from the language used in the characters in the Ms. Marvel (2022) series, considering that the main character in this series is a diaspora and minority in the city of New Jersey, United States. This research adopts two main theories: George Yule's theory of reference and Joanna Thornborrow's theory of language and identity and Dell Hymes' ethnographic theory of language that serves as a supporting theory for this approach. Kamala's identity as a Pakistani-American Muslim living in a Western environment is reflected in the series through a combination of Arabic, English and Islamic terms. The results of this study are the language can be used as a tool in constructing personal identity such as by using a name: Islamic name; naming practice: sheikh. Furthermore, the formation of group identity is built through representation as a Muslim; in-group and out-group are shown through code switching, and common Muslim behaviors performed by the main character are found in 5 categories: 1) greeting, 2) prayer before doing something, 3) ablution and prayer, 4) implementation of Eid celebration, 5) obeying parents. This research shows the diasporic experience by emphasizing the ways of code-switching and cultural references reveals Kamala's views and identity.

Keywords: *Identity, language, religious identity, Ms Marvel series,*

The Portrayal of Religious Identity Construction through Language Found in *Ms Marvel* (2022)

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ABSTRAK

Bahasa sangat berpengaruh dalam membentuk identitas. Identitas merupakan kode sosial yang dimiliki oleh setiap individu. Hal ini dapat diamati dari bahasa yang mereka gunakan dan merujuk pada kelompok tertentu. Penelitian ini membahas tentang bagaimana konstruksi identitas agama dibentuk melalui bahasa yang digunakan oleh Kamala Khan dalam serial *Ms. Marvel*. Masalah yang diangkat dalam penelitian ini adalah karakter utama yang menjelaskan hal-hal yang merujuk pada agama hanya dengan menggunakan istilah-istilah agama baik kepada rekan muslim maupun non-muslim, yang terkadang membuat lawan bicaranya bingung, terutama rekan non-muslim karena tidak terbiasa dengan istilah agama yang digunakan Kamala. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah deskriptif kualitatif. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menggambarkan dan menunjukkan bagaimana identitas agama seseorang dapat terbentuk dan dilihat dari bahasa yang digunakan pada karakter dalam serial *Ms. Marvel*. Penelitian ini mengadopsi dua teori utama: Teori referensi dari George Yule dan teori bahasa dan identitas dari Joanna Thornborrow serta teori etnografi bahasa dari Dell Hymes yang menjadi teori pendukung dalam pendekatan ini. Identitas Kamala sebagai seorang Muslim Pakistan-Amerika yang tinggal di lingkungan Barat tercermin dalam serial ini melalui kombinasi istilah-istilah bahasa Arab, Inggris, dan Islam. Hasil dari penelitian ini adalah bahasa dapat digunakan sebagai alat dalam mengkonstruksi identitas pribadi seperti dengan menggunakan nama: nama Islam; praktik penamaan: syekh. Selanjutnya, pembentukan identitas kelompok dibangun melalui representasi sebagai seorang Muslim; in-group dan out-group ditunjukkan melalui alih kode, dan perilaku Muslim yang umum dilakukan oleh karakter utama ditemukan dalam 5 kategori: 1) mengucapkan salam, 2) berdoa sebelum melakukan sesuatu, 3) berwudhu dan shalat, 4) pelaksanaan perayaan Idul Fitri, 5) mematuhi orang tua. Penelitian ini menunjukkan pengalaman diaspora dengan menekankan pada cara-cara alih kode dan referensi budaya yang mengungkapkan pandangan dan identitas Kamala.

Kata Kunci: *Identitas, bahasa, identitas keagamaan, series Ms Marvel*

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Research

Language is very personal to its users as a medium for communication. Language is closely related to the people who use it (Hariadi, 2014, p.3). People use language in a direct way to denote name and kinship terms, as well as descriptions based on traits like appearance, conduct, background, and so forth, to signify and explain the identity of an individual (Llamas and Watt, 2010, p.1). Language is unique because it lets individuals express information about them, like their age, gender, geographic location, and even their identity. Rather than just reflecting it, how a person's language preference and speech pattern shape who they are. Language is a cognitive communication tool that can express an individual's identity as a member of a wider group. Our distinct social group identities are highlighted by the differences in our fashion choices, appearance, and behavior, as well as the continual variations in our language usage. An individual's identity as a member of a larger group can be represented by language, which can be thought of as a cognitive communication tool (Felemban, 2011, p.43). Thus, language plays a role in forming identity that can affect how individuals view others.

Construction refers to the process by which social phenomena, concepts, or meanings are created and sustained through collective human action, language and cultural practices for instance gender roles, race, religion, and even aspects of scientific knowledge are often discussed as constructs shaped by historical and cultural forces rather than intrinsic truths (Berger & Luckmann, 1996, p. 3). The

term construction is representing the creation and shaping of abstract concepts such as identity, social roles, and cultural norms.

Identity is an aspect that individuals continuously develop and negotiate throughout their lives via interactions with others, and it is complex in nature where individuals assume different roles at various times in different contexts. According to Joseph, identity also holds the meaning of ‘the condition of being identical’ (Joseph, 2004, p. 2), which means that ‘being identical’ to the certain groups, such as share the same languages, cultures, as well as behaviors. It concerns who we are, our self-perception, and how we are perceived by others, not merely influenced by aspects like our place of birth and upbringing, our parental lineage, and the socio-economic class to which we belong (Thornborrow, 2006, p. 158). Furthermore, Thornborrow indicated that identity encompasses multiple factors that prompt individuals to adjust their roles based on the surrounding context (Thornborrow, 2004, 158). Religious identity represents one of the social dimensions of identity. Thus, religious identity can be understood as a collection of social norms that indicate our commitment to a specific religion while rejecting others. Safran (2008) in (Language and identity: An Introduction, 2009, p.100) has recently noted that language and religion are two of the most important markers of ethno-national identity: sometimes related, sometimes odd. He argues that religion has historically more often been the basis of identity, and its replacement by language is a more contemporary phenomenon: ‘religion reigned until the Renaissance, and language from then to the present’. Islam is among the many religions observed today. Islam

has been addressed in different facets of life portrayed through the media. One of these forms of media is a film or a television series.

A movie is a type of moving image that uses visual storytelling to tell a story. This often includes a quick display of a few still images in frames on the screen along with sound, music, and conversation. A movie is a series of moving images projected onto a screen so rapidly as to create in the mind of each person watching the screen an impression of continuous movement, these images are projected by light shining on a series of corresponding images arranged continuously by a ribbon of flexible material (Sparshott, 1971, p.11). Movies can be made for entertainment, education, or propaganda, and can be fictional or based on true events. It can be watched in cinemas, television, or via digital streaming platforms. Movies play a large role in popular culture and have a major influence on society through influencing people's attitudes, beliefs, and values.

The researcher selected the series as the subject of research since the series are infrequently utilized as a subject of research in academic papers. The series to be examined, which is *Ms Marvel* (2022), also features Muslim characters who reside in the United States as a minority and do not employ religious language, yet in practice, they can develop their religious identity. Therefore, in this research, the concept of religious identity refers to the process of shaping religious identity through the language and speech employed by Kamala Khan, the main character in the *Ms Marvel series* (2022).

The researcher found that sometimes Kamala, as the main character of the series, changes the way she speaks by using code-switching. Kamala changed her speech from English to Arabic based on who the partner is. Based on Bell's explanation (as cited in Thomas et. Al, 2004, p. 169), it is called audience design, where the speaker will change the way he speaks according to the atmosphere and situation in which the speaker speaks. The explanation can be seen from Kamala's speech that uses Arabic and English through code-switching, not infrequently she gives an explanation of the terms she uses when she talks to people who do not understand what she says. She does this to equalize with her partner. An example of this behavior can be seen in the following conversation.



Figure 1 Miguel asks the meaning of *Mashaallah*

Nakia & Kamala : “MashaAllah”

Miguel : “What does that mean?”

Nakia : “Damn.”

Kamala : “God has willed it.”

(Ep. 2, 00:13:27 – 00:13:32)

It can be seen also in the setting and scene that Kamala is using the religious terminology in Arabic although her speaking partner is not in the same beliefs with her, which is non-Muslim.

The sociolinguistic research on how people express their social or individual identity using language includes the concept of linguistic identity. Sociolinguistics is used in this research to learn more about the relationship between language and society in terms of social identity, especially elements that indicate identification with religion (religious identity). In addition, this research uses on the theory of Language and Identity by Joanna Thornborrow as its primary theoretical framework. This research also uses by Dell Hymes' ethnographic communication theory, which elucidates the significant factors that lead characters to use English instead of religious terminology when discussing religious issues with others. This research further integrates the aforementioned theories with Yule's theory of reference to illustrate the use of English as an expression of religious identity.

1.2 Research Question

Based on the phenomenon outlined in the background of the research, the researcher developed the subsequent research questions.

1. How does the language used by Kamala construct her religious identity?
2. What are the factors that influence Kamala of using religious terminology in order to convey a message to other people?

1.3 Objective of Research

The objective of this research, aligned with the issue presented in the research background, is to discover the language employed by Kamala to construct her religious identity in *Ms Marvel* (2022). Furthermore, this research intends to identify and explain why Kamala opts for religious terms instead of English terms, or why Kamala chooses English terms over religious terms when discussing topics related to religious matters.

1.4 Scope of Research

One of the areas of social identification within sociolinguistics is religious identity. This research confines the examination of linguistic identity to Kamala's language and faith. In this research, religious identity pertains to Muslim identity. The context of location and personal relationships are also investigated in this research to illustrate how language is employed to construct religious identity. By analyzing the environment and connections, it can affect an individual to utilize language that reflects their identity. (Language, Society, and Power, 2011, p. 173).

1.5 Significance of Research

The purpose of this research is to increase readers' knowledge about linguistics, especially sociolinguistic studies. By using linguistic identity theory, this research provides additional understanding to researcher regarding the function of language in showing social identity. It is hoped that future researcher can provide references for other researcher who want to research the same subject. In addition, it is hoped that this research can contribute to the advancement of linguistics and public awareness of language phenomena.

1.6 Literature Review

There are many previous research that examines religious identity. However, no previous research has examined the Series *Ms Marvel* (2022) by El Arbi and Fallah, Menon, and Obaid-Chinoy. To conduct this research, researcher refers to the four of these following researches bellow as references.

The initial preceding research was conducted by Jumana (2019). By employing the author's viewpoint in South Korea, this research aims to demonstrate how language can mirror the religious identity of Arab characters. To establish a religious identity, the researcher utilized Thornborrow's Identity Theory. Within this research, the primary character formulates the religious identity of Arabs employing religious language and additional components. Furthermore, the research indicated that this language conveys religious identity information at both personal and group levels of the character in three categories, specifically 1) selecting halal food, 2) limitations between religions, 3) and distinctions between men and women.

The second research was conducted by Igo (2010) who explored the connection between language choice and identity, emphasizing how individuals select words that reflect their social and personal identities. The primary emphasis of this research is on the way, in the context of language usage, collective identity (“We”) and individual identity (“I”) can at times be perceived as similar. The researcher used language as a tool to construct identity as well as to show and maintain identity to illustrate this research. The researcher argues that language choice is closely linked to the speaker's sense of self and place in the wider social

group, and is not solely a matter of pragmatic efficiency or cultural preference. The article emphasizes how the distinction between individual and collective self-representation can sometimes be blurred when the plural pronoun “we” is used to indicate a common identity or group affiliation. This creates a complicated situation where language is used to negotiate social belonging, solidarity and power.

The third research was conducted by Samarin (1987). This research contrasts religious language from both a sociolinguistic and linguistic viewpoint and examines how language functions in religious ceremonies and how crucial it is in influencing religious experience and identity. The journal examines how religious language serves as a powerful instrument for organizing beliefs, setting social boundaries, and reinforcing spiritual authority in addition to being a means of communication. Samarin highlights the unique linguistic characteristics that distinguish religious speech from general language, including ritual language, sacred texts, and specialized terminology. The research of religious language, according to the journal, offers important insights into how religion functions in culture and how language affects religious experience.

The fourth research was conducted by Zamfir (2014). This research examines how identity is formed through communication interactions and then explains how identity and language are interrelated as well as how people create hybrid identities through language, particularly in multicultural and multilingual environments. This research focuses on how language shapes social and personal identities, particularly when people combine multiple linguistic and cultural ties. To develop new hybrid identity forms that represent their various experiences,

Zamfir studies how people combine multiple languages and cultural norms. By discussing diverse theoretical positions and approaches, the article attempts to: 1) provide a comprehensive overview of the different levels and dimensions of identity; and 2) show that identity theory cannot avoid its subjective elements, such as comments on the partner's setting, history, and status. The research shows that interaction is the basic cornerstone of identity and that it is the communication network, not the community, that determines the identity of individuals more.

The four studies mentioned above show similar findings to this research. The keywords of this research's focus on language and identity that will be discussed by the researcher. Meanwhile, this research differs from the previous studies as it uses the movie *Ms Marvel* (2022) which has never been studied in this context. This research does not use only one theory like the previous studies. Instead, this research uses one main theory, that is Joanna Thornborrow's theory of language and identity, supported by two other theories, those are Dell Hymes' ethnographic theory and Yule's theory of reference.

1.7 Theoretical Approach

In this research, the researcher uses three theories to examine Kamala's language in forming her religious identity in the series titled Kamala. First, Joanna Thornborrow's identity theory is employed to scrutinize Kamala's speech in establishing her Islamic identity. This theory posits that language plays a crucial role in the formation of community or individual identity. It involves not merely using a specific dialect or code to express identity, but also how we utilize language to communicate and engage with others to reflect identity (Thornborrow, 2006, p.

159). Some of the ways language creates identity include: 1) Individual identity is created using names and naming practices; address systems, 2) group identity can be constructed through certain types of representations; ingroups and outgroups (Thornborrow, 2006, p. 160). Meanwhile, since this research mainly considers how language can help one form a religious identity, the concepts of power and linguistic imperialism are not applicable.

Second, the reference theory by Yule. Reference, as explained by Yule (1996, p. 17) is the act of using linguistic expressions to direct listener's attention to specific entities, objects, or ideas in the external world. Yule differentiates between two types of referring expressions, those are, proper nouns and definitite descriptions. The argument that the language reflects Kamala's religious identity is supported by this idea. In order to identify a particular community, references contain both names and referents. To find out how Kamala's religious identity is represented, the researcher applied this theory.

Third, Dell Hymes' ethnographic theory. Eight different features are listed in this theory. The settings and scenes, participants, ends, act of sequences, keys, instrument, norms of interactions, and genres (Wardhaugh, 2006, p.247). Each of these describes the purpose of language use. The researcher aims to decipher the statements of the main character and her partner, which have the potential to shape her religious identity.

1.8 Methods of Research

1.8.1 Types of Research

This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach that considers language as a formal object to address the research questions posed. Qualitative descriptive methods are utilized to comprehend the phenomena encountered in research, such as behaviors, perceptions, actions, and others, by articulating them in words grounded in their context (Moleong as cited in Shodiq, 2021, p. 81). As stated by Creswell (2013, p. 32), qualitative research serves as a means to investigate and comprehend the significance attributed to a social or human entity by individuals or groups. The researcher contends that the application of descriptive methodology is pertinent to this investigation. The researcher uses an inductive descriptive method by doing an observation to the object. An inductive method, according to Creswell (2013, p. 26), is a method of inquiry in which the researcher begins with specific observations or data develops broader open minded method such as interviews, documentations, and observations. This research's objective is to characterize the linguistic phenomena involved in the formation of Kamala's religious identity.

1.8.2 Data Source

Based on its origin, information can be classified into two categories, which are primary data and secondary data (Creswell, 2009, p. 4). The researcher utilizes two data sources to enhance this research. The primary data consists of the series titled *Ms Marvel*, which released in 2022 and has only one season consisting of six episodes. The series narrates the story of Kamala, an imaginative superhero fan,

particularly regarding Captain Marvel. Until she acquires superpowers similar to those of the heroes she admires, Kamala feels out of place at school and sometimes even at her home. The series is directed and produced by El Arbi and Fallah, Menon, and Obaid-Chinoy. The secondary data source is the subtitles for the series available on Disney+, the streaming service for *Ms Marvel* (2022).

1.8.3 Data Collection Technique

In this regard, the researcher employs documentation as the technique for data collection. According to Sugiyono (2013, p. 240), documentation can be both written and visualized by an individual to gather information. The documentation method requires written materials to obtain data (Zaim, 2014, p. 98). Arikunto (2006, p. 231) mentioned that the documentation technique is derived from media, magazines, news articles, or books. Therefore, the researcher utilizes subtitles as the written data. This research will incorporate art along with drawings, sculptures, series, and numerous other media since it utilizes a film as its subject. The researcher adhered to a series of steps to collect data, which included watching and focusing on the series multiple times to completely grasp its overall context—particularly the dialogue delivered by Kamala, the main character.

1.8.4 Data Analysis Technique

The identity approach is utilized by the researcher to investigate the data. By employing determiners beyond the language in use, the researcher is also capable of determining the identification of the linguistic unit. In other terms, the researcher evaluates the data through tools that are not part of the data itself. This research uses an inductive qualitative method by collecting the data through

observation. According to Creswell (2013, p. 180), data analysis technique in qualitative research consists of preparing and organizing the data for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing codes, and finally representing the data in figures, table, or a discussion. In this reserach, the researcher applies steps from Cresswell to analyze the data:

1. *Read or observe the data.* The researcher searched for the data in the *Ms Marvel* (2022) on Disney+.
2. *Search and find the data for analysis in the object.* The researcher begins to view and focus on the episodes and the subtitles of *Ms Marvel* (2022).
3. *Begin gathering the data.* The researcher needs to compile the religious terms from the series.
4. *Use the collecting process to create a depiction of the environment or individuals, along with classifications or themes for analysis .* The researcher needs to employ the collecting data process to provide a thorough description of the information in the series for analysis objectives.
5. *Advance the way in which the description and theme will be illustrated in the qualitative narrative.* The researcher has the ability to demonstrate the connection between the description in *Ms Marvel* (2022) and the qualitative and documentation approach.
6. *A concluding phase includes interpreting the findings or results in qualitative research.* The researcher begins to interpret and analyze the data gathered from *Ms Marvel* (2022).

1.9 Paper Organization

There are four sections in this research. Each section addresses a different group of subjects. The Introduction in the first section offers readers a brief overview of the research. This section includes nine sub-sections, which comprise the background of the research, the scope of the research, the research question, the goals of the research, the importance of the research, literature survey, the theoretical framework, the research methodology, and the organization of the paper. The second section will detail the theoretical framework of this research in greater depth. In this section, the researcher will outline Joanna Thornborrow's identity theory, Yule's reference theory, and the ethnographic theory posited by Dell Hyme. The third section will explore the findings and analysis, in which the researcher begins to examine and interpret the findings from selected dialogues and data in the series Ms. Marvel (2022). The final section will present the conclusions and recommendations. It encompasses all conclusions drawn from the research as well as suggestions or recommendations for the research or for future research.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

4.1 Conclusion

The investigator explores the way an individual develops their religious identity through the language that the person utilized. In this research, the investigator identifies the religious identity of the protagonist in *Ms Marvel* (2022) based on the findings and discussions in the preceding chapter. The investigator can address the research queries presented in the first chapter by employing Joanna Thornborrow's theory of language and identity as the primary framework, alongside George Yule's reference theory to demonstrate how she employs Arabic as a reference to her religious identity and Dell Hymes' theory of speech ethnography as a supplementary framework to clarify the factors that affect the character's use of Arabic to address religious issues, despite the fact that the conversant is not always a Muslim.

The researcher identifies 42 instances of data from the findings and discussion chapter of the research and focuses on analyzing Kamala Khan, the central character of the series, and how she shapes her religious identity through the language she employs in her everyday discussions. Kamala's religious identity as a Muslim can be deduced from the terms she utilizes to discuss religious matters in three distinct ways. The researcher discovered that Kamala is capable of expressing her religious identity. For instance, the name “Kamala” carries Islamic implications, indicating that it could be a personal aspect that discloses her religious identity as a Muslim. Additionally, through in-group and out-group depictions. Kamala's

spiritual identity is also evident in her group identity. The use of the Arabic language for religious terminology illustrates the representation in the formation of group identity.

While the factors that influence Kamala using Arabic instead of English when addressing religion is clarified by speech ethnography. The context and environment, the conversational participants, the goal of the conversation, the circumstances surrounding the dialogue, the atmosphere created by the participants, the means utilized by the participants to engage in discussion, the nature of the relationship among the participants, and the type of conversation are eight elements that affect the employment of Arabic as a reference for religious language. Both the in-group and out-group exhibit Muslim conduct and code-switching. Kamala alternates between communicating with a Muslim and a non-Muslim. Kamala's behaviors, including wudu and prayer, respect for elders, and similar actions, further illustrate her association with the Islamic faith.

4.2 Suggestion

The researcher concluded that this research still has shortcomings in some areas. Therefore, language and identity theory can be used to further investigate some aspects. This research only narrowed down the research topic to the utterance of Kamala used. However, there are still many elements that can be thoroughly researched from the object.

The researcher suggests that future scholars researching identity formation better describe and analyze intersectionality, looking at the ways in which Kamala's gender identity and religion interact. This can be interpreted as a question of how

her experience as a Muslim woman differs from that of Muslim men in comparable situations. As such, future researcher can use intersectionality to teach others more about how people construct their identities. For additional investigation, future researcher can also apply this topic to various objects, such as short films, comics, novels, or stories.



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