



The Ambivalence In Hisaye Yamamoto's *Seventeen Syllables*

Ai Trisnawati¹, Ida Wiranti², Neuis Nurul Faujiah³, Seftiani Amindari⁴, Titin Wartini⁵

1,2,3,,4,5 Universitas Pamulang, Banten

Received: 06 Maret 2024
Revised: 22 Maret 2024
Accepted: 30 Maret 2024

Abstract

*This study aims to reveal the ambivalence in the short story *Seventeen Syllables* (1988) by Hisaye Yamamoto. This study uses qualitative methods. "Seventeen Syllables" was written by Japanese-American author Yamamoto, who focused on the various problems faced by Japanese immigrants to the United States in the late 19th century. She writes stories that capture the disconnect between her original Japanese family and her children exposed to American culture. The ambivalent issue in this short story is illustrated by the main characters, namely Rosie, who is pro-American, and her mother, who faces a cultural gap between Japanese and American culture, which then relates to the relationship between parents and children. This short story shows how differences in culture and values will cause tension and disputes, especially between different generations in an immigrant family, which will put the family in the middle between the original culture and the new culture. With characters representing different cultures and generations, Yamamoto creates interesting stories and complex games. She showed that Japanese Americans still struggle with ambivalence about their cultural identity and the balance of different cultures and values in their lives in America. The stories in *Seventeen Syllables* represent the voices of marginalized minorities and celebrate the complex struggles for cultural identity in America's multicultural society. This intergenerational conflict often creates ambivalence and confusion, especially when the original and new cultures overlap. With the aim of the issue of ambivalence, this study uses post-colonial theory, which is narrowed down by Homi's theory. K Bhabha which includes the concepts of ambivalence, mimicry, and hybridity.*

Keywords: Ambivalence, Immigrant, Cultural Identity

(*) Corresponding Author: rainbowc345@gmail.com

How to Cite: Trisnawat, A., Wiranti, I., Faujiah, N. N., Amindari, S., & Wartini, T. (2024). The Ambivalence In Hisaye Yamamoto's *Seventeen Syllables*. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.11080252>.

INTRODUCTION

At this time, many people from the East State have difficulty in determining their identity. This is because of the cultural influence at the time of the colonization enters their country. According to Ashcroft (2007, p. 62), the creation of a typical culture as a result of the development of invaders to the aggrained areas. The typical cultural influence results in the colonized countries' tendency to follow the culture. But they will not be able to follow the culture intact because it is not the identity of their origin.

The Glory of State Colonizers conquer many, many countries easing many of their colonies to admire the Pasca Colonial ends, and many people immigrate to the Colonizer's country to have a better life. Guarantees to get good educational facilities, employment, and an excellent career make them interested in settling in the country. Over time, the original culture that is possessed to be lost on their self. Loss of self-identity is one of the ambivalent processes they experience. One

concept of post-colonialism refers to the ambivalence that describes the conditions that are experienced by a team that is aggrieved when immigrating to a colonial country (Bhabha, 1994, p. 22).

Furthermore, in reality, the admiration of Easterners for the colonial state makes one's identity grey and flanked by indecision; of course, these people will always prioritize personal interests by making themselves unite with the colonial nation. According to Yuroini (2013), facing ambivalent experiences will not only lead to ambivalent subjects but will also emphasize former colonialists be equal to colonialists. So for that reason, many Eastern people moved to colonial countries as immigrants to obtain new luck and more profitable opportunities for their existence in a new country and atmosphere. On the other hand, this study brings out the ambivalence that occurs in Japanese immigrants living in America with significant cultural differences. Japanese culture is known to uphold traditional values. This makes Japanese society prioritize group interests. In contrast to American culture, which has a variety of cultures, Americans have individual freedom and prioritize personal interests. Economics, policies, culture or space can be seen as such a context forming immigrant life and determining the dynamics of integration that can be seen from work policy for immigrant whose smoke becomes local or working in the market (Hatziprokopiou, 2005). The result is that immigrant should fight hard to get the same equality. However, it needs to be understood that this is only a generalization and does not apply to everyone in Japan or America, and everyone's adaptability may vary.

Storytelling has long been valued for its ability to convey complex emotions, explore complex contexts, and provoke thought. In the world of literature, short stories occupy a special place because they attract readers' attention in a limited time and often leave lasting impressions. A noteworthy short story is "Seventeen Syllables" by Hisaye Yamamoto, which brings together themes of cultural conflict, generational differences, and the profound influence of language. The problem of ambivalence is at the heart of this interesting story.

Hisaye Yamamoto is a Japanese-American writer who is considered to be very influential in Asian-American literature. Yamamoto is best known for depicting the muffled drama in a Japanese-American family. His works, including "Seventeen Syllables", chronicle the experiences of Japanese immigrants and their descendants in the United States. Yamamoto's greatness as a writer is Yamamoto's ability to create lively and realistic characters. He describes their lives and experiences and offers deep insight into his characters' backgrounds, feelings, and motivations. Yamamoto has an uncanny ability to tell solid and compelling stories. He uses a subtle and descriptive writing style to describe events and situations in striking detail. It creates an emotional connection in the reader with his story. Yamamoto's works often address essential themes such as identity, race, and generational tension. He eloquently describes the experiences of Japanese-American immigrants and how they faced discrimination and struggled to maintain their culture in a different society.

Seventeen Syllables' greatness lies in its ability to portray its characters' emotional complexities and conflicts. It presents the Japanese American community's struggles for identity, culture, and assimilation. This works also examines Japanese Americans' racial experiences and discrimination, especially

during World War 2 and their exile. Hisaye Yamamoto can make the reader feel the emotional conflicts of his characters. Yamamoto was able to create lively and realistic characters. He describes their lives and experiences and offers deep insight into his characters' backgrounds, feelings, and motivations. Yamamoto has an uncanny ability to tell solid and compelling stories. He uses a subtle and descriptive writing style to describe events and situations in striking detail. It creates an emotional connection in the reader with his story. Yamamoto's works often address essential themes such as identity, race, and generational tension. He eloquently describes the experiences of Japanese American immigrants and how they faced discrimination and struggled to survive.

Ambivalence has been examined in several earlier studies, including one called by Shidiswara (2022). He analyzed a novel written by Mohamed Kacimi El-Hassani entitled "Le Mouchoir (1987). In this study found that the magic properties of the characters, as indicated by the narrator and the Mahfoud reflects the postcolonial properties of" ambivalence ". In addition, the study entitled" The Ambivalence of Identity as a Result of Intergenerational Cultural Clasts in the PP Wong's The Life of A Banana ". This study uses a data source from the novel entitled" The Live Banana " by PP Wong (2014). This study discusses the phrases, clauses, and sentences associated with cultural and ambivalence clashes.

This study uses Homi K. Bhabha's concept of cultural place. In general, it refers to a state of uncertainty or conflict experienced by individuals or cultures in a postcolonial context. The term of ambivalence is first developed in psychoanalysis to describe a continual fluctuation between wanting one thing and wanting other thing (Young, 1995, p. 161). Bhabha argues that in postcolonial situations, marginalized individuals or cultures face ambivalence about their relationship with the dominant culture. They may be attracted to or influenced by the dominant culture but, at the same time, feel resistance or disobedience to that authority.

Bhabha explains that ambivalence is the result of a meeting between the dominant culture and the dominant culture. When these cultures meet, rifts emerge where identities and resistance form. Ambivalence reflects the tensions and complex processes of identity and cultural change in the postcolonial context. In his book, Bhabha explains the importance of understanding the ambivalence between cultural studies and post-colonialism. He argues that by recognizing and understanding ambivalence, we can see how marginalized individuals or cultures negotiate and struggle with the dominant culture, creating complex and hybrid identities.

Ambivalence can be seen as a state of conflicting feelings or attitudes towards a person, situation or concept. In "Seventeen Syllables," characters struggle with their own ambivalence as they navigate a complex web of personal desires, social expectations, and cultural identities. The purpose of this analysis is to explain the problem and how it manifests itself in the actions, conversations, and internal struggles of the characters. By exploring the ambivalences described, we hope to gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of human emotions and the complex dynamics of multiple generations and cultural influences.

To understand the significance of this issue, our analysis examines key moments in the story where the ambivalence is most evident. We carefully examine

the main characters' choices, exploring the motives and conflicting emotions that guide their actions. In addition, we consider the wider implications of ambivalence in this story, considering its impact on cultural assimilation, personal identity and the pursuit of happiness. By investigating the question of ambivalence in "Seventeen Syllables", we aim to gain a deeper understanding of the complex interplay of conflicting emotions, cultural expectations, and personal desires. Through this analysis, we hope to shed light on the enduring meaning of this novel, which continues to captivate readers with its ability to portray the complexities of the human experience. This is a qualitative descriptive study in which the data is taken from a short story written by Hisaye Yamamoto entitled "Seventeen Syllables". According to Creswell (2009) Investigating and comprehending the meaning that people or groups assign to a social human situation is possible through qualitative research. Data is collected by reading the short story in depth to find the narrative of ambivalence experienced by the characters in the short story. This topic of ambivalence was retrieved from the readings, and the draft quotations were analyzed. The data in this study are narration and dialogue taken from the short story "Seventeen Syllables". Several related books and journal articles for ambivalence studies were also used. Then, the excerpts collected from the short story are analyzed to reveal the ambivalence experienced by the characters in the short story. Next, the analytical essay is structured toward interpreting the corpus obtained. Finally, the conclusion is set to reveal the problem of ambivalence in the short story.

METHODS

This analytical study uses a qualitative descriptive method because it explains a social event which is the author's way of analyzing the paper. This method is considered very important by the author because this method will provides a form of explanation regarding a phenomenon that is interpreted in the context and concept of the writing. I was interested in this article because it tells about immigrants who try to adapt to a new culture, which often happens in society today. Through short stories, we want to be able to create works with the theme of ambivalence, so this writing is very suitable for us.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

In this section, the ambivalence in Hisaye Yamamoto's "Seventeen Syllables" is reflected through the character Named Rosie. Rosie's character describes an American citizen who has Japanese ancestry. Yamamoto explains how Rosie has to experience two different cultures simultaneously. Rosie, born as a descendant of Japan in America, made her more familiar with American culture than her native culture. This condition makes Rosie behave like an American even though they are Japanese. Related to the first goal, the presence of ambivalence is structurally and relationally regulated. (Furlong et al., 2006).

Rosie's difficulty understanding Japanese

In the short story Seventeen Syllables by Hisaye Yamamoto, ambivalence is depicted through two characters, Rosie and Tome. They are a pair of mother and daughter in which there is a cultural conflict between them because Tome, the

mother, tries to continue practising her Japanese culture. In contrast, her daughter, who is attached to modern American culture, makes Tome worry that his child will lose his original culture. Tome's struggle to find his identity and his attempts to establish himself as a role model for Rosie can be seen in several quotes in this short story.

Rosie's ambivalence is proven in the quote below:

It was about cats, and Rosie pretended to understand it thoroughly and appreciate it no end, partly because she hesitated to disillusion her mother about the quantity and quality of Japanese school every Saturday and Wednesday, too, in the summer (Seventeen Syllables and Other Stories, 1988, p. 210).

Rosie, even though she was born as a Japanese descendant because her father and mother were immigrants, in fact, she was born in America. She will automatically absorb the American culture that she always encounters every day. Ambivalence is described as having “mixed feelings” or “being pulled in different directions” and simultaneously experiencing positive and negative orientations toward an object, such as a goal or mission. (Ashforth et al., Citation2014, p. 1454). However, her mother wants Rosie to not forget her native culture, namely Japan, by sending Rosie to a Japanese school and introducing her to traditional Japanese poetry. As immigrant parents, they want their children to learn their native language to maintain their language heritage and secure their ethnic identity and family ties (Becker, 2013). Even so, Rosie's understanding of the Japanese culture that her mother introduced her to is not all she understands because of the cultural gap surrounding her.

Rosie describes herself as having no interest in the language of her origin. Shown in the quote below:

The truth was that Rosie was lazy, English lay ready on the tongue but Japanese had to be searched for and examined, and even then put forth tentatively (probably to meet with laughter). (Seventeen Syllables and Other Stories, p. 211)

From the quote above, it can be seen that Rosie has difficulty absorbing Japanese, which is her native language. This shows Rosie's ambivalent towards her origins in Japanese culture. Japanese has become a symbol of her cultural identity, which she has forgotten. Ambivalence does not only represent the different thoughts that appears at same time but also can represent the contrast feeling toward society. The contrast feeling toward society occurs toward racial groups and other social groups (Larsen, 2007, p. 1). Therefore her mother feels that Rosie needs to learn Japanese so that her original culture does not fade away. Then this quote reveals the ambivalence and struggle of cultural identity. Rosie's rejection of Japanese culture is a symbol of division and uncertainty about her identity. Many immigrant parents make special rules for language learning, such as studying at home, private tutoring, and sending their children to special schools for their language (Becker, 2013). The sentence explains that parents with migrant backgrounds have special rules for their children's language acquisition. This includes activities such as studying at home, taking advantage of private tutoring, and sending children to special schools that focus on teaching the language they want to master. This approach shows the commitment of parents to help their children learn the language well and communicate fluently.

Rosie describes herself as having no interest in the language of her origin. Shown in the quote below:

"The truth was that Rosie was lazy, English lay ready on the tongue but Japanese had to be searched for and examined, and even then put forth tentatively (probably to meet with laughter)" (Seventeen Syllables and Other Stories, p. 211)

From the quote above, it can be seen that Rosie has difficulty absorbing Japanese, which is her native language. This shows Rosie's ambivalence towards her origins in Japanese culture. Japanese has become a symbol of her cultural identity, which she has forgotten. Ambivalence can also refer to a negative attitude toward society and the conflicting sentiments that are present at the same time. The contrast feeling toward society occurs toward racial groups and other social groups (Larsen, 2007, p. 1). Therefore her mother feels that Rosie needs to learn Japanese so that her original culture does not fade away. Then this quote reveals the ambivalence and struggle of cultural identity. Rosie's rejection of Japanese culture is a symbol of division and uncertainty about her identity. Many immigrant parents make special rules for language learning, such as studying at home, private tutoring, and sending their children to special schools for their language (Becker, 2013). The sentence explains that parents with children's migrant backgrounds have special rules for their children's language acquisition. This includes activities such as studying at home, taking advantage of private tutoring, and sending children to special schools that focus on teaching the language they want to master. This approach shows the commitment of parents to help their children learn the language well and communicate fluently.

Bilingualism in Rossie's habits

Rosie, who incidentally has American citizenship, continues to absorb the culture around her, making her unwilling to continue dealing with the culture of her parents. However, Immigrants do ambivalence as a way to protect himself from potential failures or hateful speech experienced by the earlier than the person who is native of the country (Reich & Wheeler, 2016). Even so, there will be a mix-up between the languages used in everyday life, seeing as Rosie communicates in Japanese with her mother daily and speaks English with the people around her. It can be seen from the quote below:

"She announced loudly that she was going to the privy outside, "I'm going to the benjo!" and slipped out the door" (Seventeen Syllables and Other Stories, 1988, p.215)

This quote shows Rosie's habit of speaking, which mixes her everyday language with the language her mother often uses. Her rejection of her own culture makes Rosie unconsciously make her accustomed to a speech she understands little. According to the ambivalence hypothesis, when two languages interact, they don't only replace one another; they also affect one another and give rise to new forms. Using a combination of words and expressions from several languages, this technique can create a hybrid language (creole), a pidgin, or another language (Bhabha, 1994). This mixing old languages is usually done as a means of expressing multiple identities and experiences.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion is that ambivalence exists in the short story *Seventeen Syllables* presented by the character Rosie. According to the short story's narrator, Rosie's ostensibly purely American attitude reflects her unclear cultural identity. The dominance of Japanese culture in her family pressured Rosie to mix Japanese culture with the American culture that surrounded her. Even so, ambivalence can not only be seen from the cultural interest but also from the aspect of the language used. The mix of languages shows that Rosie is still searching for her identity.

The difficulty in adapting to two cultures makes one confused. Indigenous culture does not only refer to heredity, because in essence teaching culture one in place of culture two will have many obstacles that hinder the absorption of the culture itself. All the findings of the analysis in this study imply that *Seventeen Syllables* describes the relevance of postcolonial issues. An analysis of the ambivalent attitude represented by the characters that suggest and influence his habits can be found in his struggles. Therefore, the narrator is considered successful in presenting colonial perspectives throughout the story and exemplifying colonial practices in literary works.

REFERENCES

- Ashforth, B., Rogers, K., Pratt, M., & Pradies, C. (2014). Ambivalence in organizations: A multilevel approach. *Organization Science*, 25(5), 1453–1478. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2014.0909>
- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth, and Helen Tiffin. (2007). *Key Concepts in Post-colonial Studies* (second edition). New York: Routledge
- Becker, Duckyoung Jung. (2013). *"Parents' Attitudes Toward Their Children's Heritage Language Maintenance: The Case of Korean Immigrant Parents in West Michigan"*. Masters Theses.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. Routledge.
- Burhanudin, Arif (2017) *The Ambivalence Of Identity As A Result Of Intergenerational Cultural Clash In Pp Wong's The Life Of A Banana*. *Lambung Pustaka Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta*.
- Caswell, D. (2020). Talking policy into being—how street-level bureaucrats and vulnerable unemployed talk about labor market participation. *European Policy Analysis*, 6(1), 23–37. <https://doi.org/10.1002/epa2.1071>
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Flinkfeldt, M. (2017). Wanting to work: Managing the sick role in high-stake sickness insurance meetings. *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 39(7), 1149–1165. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9566.12567>
- Furlong, A., Cartmel, F., & Biggart, A. (2006). *Choice biographies and transitional linearity*. Re-conceptualising modern youth transitions.
- Larsen, J. T. 2007. Ambivalence. In R. F. Baumeister & K. D. Vohs (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of social psychology*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Reich, T., & Wheeler, S. C. (2016). The good and bad of ambivalence: Desiring ambivalence under outcome uncertainty. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 110(4), 493–508. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspa0000047>

- Sidhiswara, I. (2022). Ambivalence In Mohammed Kamici El-Hassani's *Le Mouchoir*. *Poetika: Jurnal Ilmu Sastra*, 10(1), 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.22146/poetika.v10i1.70440>
- Yamamoto, H. (1988). *Seventeen syllables*. Rutgers University Press.
- Young, Robert J C. (1995). *Colonial desire: hybridity in theory, culture, and race*. London Routledge.
- Yusroini, N. (2013). The ambivalence In Jumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*. *Litera Kultura : Journal of Literary and Cultural Studies*, 1(3). <https://doi.org/10.26740/lk.v1i3.3842>