

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of Study

Women are unique human beings. According to Shuy in the book of *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*, women are one of the mysteries of the universe (Holmes, 2001). It is not easy to know a woman's thoughts. They have their own world that no one can easily understand, especially to men. There are many factors which make them different from men, for instance women and men do not speak exactly in the same way as each other in any community. As cited in Rosita, some linguists and communication experts do believe that men and women can be seen as two separate cultures because of the way they talk (2001).

Women tend to be more cooperative conversationalists than men (Holmes, 2001). It can be seen from the way women speak. Lakoff said in her book entitled *Language and Woman's Place*, about the differences between how girls and boys are taught to communicate (1975). She found that girls and boys literally learn different languages as they grow up. Girls are taught in more passive voice and boys emerge from their "rough talk" stage with a more forceful and active voice (Cameron, 1990). Poynton added that women speak 'better' (more 'correctly' and with 'refined' accents) than men, men swear and use slang words than women, women can talk smoothly over difficult situations and men find this more difficult (1989).

Ludwig and communication experts differentiate women and men from the way they talk meanwhile Gramley and Patzold differentiate women and men from the topic they talk while gossiping. They said that women tend to use topics such as cosmetics, clothes, celebrity, and relationship on the other side men favor topics like money, business, and sports (in Rosita, 2001). Women tend to avoid several topics because it would cause discomfort (Holmes, 2004). Sally Johnson and Frank Finlay added that men tend to use competitive talk when they are talking with their male friends but in the other side women use cooperative and supportive way of talking (Coates, 2004).

Many theories, linguistics, and communication experts showed the differences between men and women in the way they talk. Many proverbs and jokes also claimed some negative stereotypes relating to women and language. Some examples of proverb that tell about women's talk, such as in English proverb: "A women tongue wags like a lamb's tail", and "Foxes are all tail and women are all tongue" (Coates, 2004). In Japanese proverb: "Onna sannin yoreba kashimashii" that mean if three women gather together, it becomes clamorous. These proverbs imply that many people stereotypically think women are more talkative than men, or moreover that women talk too much. Instead of some proverbs, there is also a joke of talkative female mostly known: "What are the three fastest means of communication? Telegraph, telephone, and tell a woman". There was also a survey done by local newspaper in Surabaya in the year 2000, Jawa Pos about women's language. The result was shocking that 95.7% of 350 female university students admitted that they like gossiping in campus. The rest

4.3% admitted never gossiping in campus (Jawa Pos; July 21st, 2000 cited in Rosita, 2001). Based on this result, the writer is interested in doing a research about gossip talk between female university students, to know why gossip is closely related to women and what kind of conversational features and functional categories that occur in the conversation when they were gossiping.

Women typically describe their friendship in terms of closeness and emotional attachment. What characterizes friendships, between women is the willingness to share important feelings, thoughts, experiences, and support. Cameron sees the way they do gossip is a form of bonding which increases solidarity and intimacy between them who are participating in the conversation (2003). Women devote a good deal of time and intensity of involvement to friends. In her book entitled "Women, Men and Language", Coates stated that talk is central to women's friendship (2004).

According to Holmes, if women tend to talk more in informal, unstructured, and non task oriented situations, on the other side men talk in formal situations where there is a concrete, instrumental task to be accomplished (2001). Men are assumed that when they have conversation with others, it should have significant content, be interesting and meaningful. They see conversation as a means of establishing status and power. On the other hand, women are assumed to talk about small things, which is often perceived as too much talk or gossip. Women maintain such conversation because it makes women feel that they are not alone. (Tannen, 2001).

Gossip describes the kind of relaxed in-group talk that goes on between people in informal context. In western society, gossip is defined as 'idle talk' and considered particularly characteristic of women's interaction. Women's gossip also focuses on personal experiences and personal relationships, on personal problems and feelings (Holmes, 2001). Emler Nicholas defined gossip as the basic process in the social psychology of everyday life because it provides people with information which is proven to be fundamental for coping with the social worlds, in a way that helps people to solve the various problems they face and to deal with different people in their surrounding (Coates, 2004). If looking at Emler Nicholas definition, gossip can be done by women and men. In order to make them survive living in society otherwise they will be isolated from the society.

There were some studies done about women's conversation and gossip. The study was done by Rosita in 2001. She is a student of English Department Petra Christian University in Surabaya, her thesis entitled A Sociolinguistics Study on Speech Features of Female Students of Petra Christian University while Gossiping in Campus. The study done by Rosita looks similar with the writer's study but actually there are lots of differences. Besides she conducted the thesis in 2001, she also took the subject of observation is female students of English department with the same background. Their background is students, but in this study the writer also takes the same subject of observation with different background. The subject of observation of this study is female transferred students who are working.

In this study, the writer does not want to compare about the differences between men and women's gossip style but she wants to focus on the women's way of talking while they are gossiping. The writer observed and analyzed the activities of gossiping between English department female students of Faculty of Humanities, Airlangga University where she studies. From the activity of gossiping, the writer analyzed the conversational features and the functional categories which appear in the conversation produced by the English department female students. This activity attracted the writer to look further about the gossip they talk about. The writer is interested in knowing the conversational features which showed up in each conversation based on Coates' theories and the functional categories based on Jones' theories. Coates describes several conversational features such as minimal responses or back-channel, hedges, tag question, commands and directives, swearing and taboo language, and compliments (2004). Meanwhile the functional categories which are taken from Jones' theories was classified into four numbers including house-talk, scandal, bitching, and chatting (1990). The writer decided to use such theories because they answer the problems of the reserach.

1.2. Statement of The Problems

1. What kinds of functional categories does the gossip done by the English department female students belong to?
2. What kinds of conversational features does the gossip done by the English department female students have?

1.3. Scope and Limitations

The scope of this study is about women's conversational features which are different from men's as seen through the gossip expressions they produced. In this study, the participants are English department female students from Faculty of Humanities Airlangga University. Because of the limited subjects of observation, the result of this study cannot be generalized for instance to all female labor, housewives, etc.

1.4. Objectives of The Study

Providing the answer of the questions above, the objectives of the study are to find out the conversational features and to reveal the functional categories that occurred in the gossip done by English department female students of Faculty of Humanities Airlangga University while they are gossiping.

1.5. Significance of The Study

The significance of this study is for students who are interested in studying about language and gender, this study is significantly useful to give them knowledge about women's language so they become aware that women produce specific conversational features when they interact with their female friends especially in informal situation in this case when they are gossiping. The writer also hopes this study could be useful for anyone who reads it and could be additional references of women's language

especially gossip for those who want to make further studies about this field.

1.6. Definition of The Study

- Gossip is defined as ‘idle talk’ and considered particularly characteristic of women’s interaction. Its overall function for women is to affirm solidarity and maintain the social relationships between the women involved. Women’s gossip also focuses on personal experiences and personal relationships, on personal problems and feelings. (Holmes, 2001).
- Gossip functional categories are divided into four functional categories: house talk, scandal, bitching, and chatting. (Cameron, 1990)
- Conversational features such as minimal responses or back-channels, hedges, tag questions, questions, commands and directives, swearing and taboo language, and compliments. (Coates, 2004)