

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter contains the introduction of the thesis. The introduction chapter divided into background of the study that explain the phenomenon examined, statement of the problem which states the research questions of the study, objective of the study, the significance of the study, and the definition of key terms.

#### **1.1 Background of the Study**

One of the famous cartoon series in the United States is “The Simpsons”, which is according to StatisticBrain (2014), up to 24 seasons released that contains 500 episodes in total, 13,4 million spectators in the first season, and 12,33 billion total franchise revenue, “The Simpsons” is now considered as the longest and most successful serial. The writer has chosen this serial because he found that the Simpsons is a unique serial that deliver a lot of messages and special “hidden messages” inside it, usually a social sarcasm of the portrait of the society, and of course, a gender-stereotypical issue. The Simpsons is quickly becoming a recognizable cultural source for examining shifting political, social, and religious trends in the United States (Feltmate, 2013). Because of its contents that sometimes deliver violence, sex, bad language, and several drinking and smoking act in the scenes, “The Simpsons” is rated as a twelve-and-above or a parental guidance program by the American television supervisor.

It is not a secret anymore that males and females are portrayed and treated in a different way by the society's gender role. The society has its own value for each gender on how to behave and act, to be considered as a right-gendered person. According to Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (2003), the society's generalization about males and females, for example, male are rational and aggressive, while females are irrational and passive, has become the standard of gender and has become the common feature of each gender in the society. The role of masculinity is for male and femininity is for female has been rooted in the society's mind concept.

Stets and Burke (2000) state that the rule of femininity and masculinity depended on one's social gender role rather than the sex of the person, and society is the one that shaped the idea of how a good male and female should be. Because of the power of social judgments that the society has to shape the definition of how males and females should act, the definition of how male or female of each society should behave have changed over time, and all of the changes are rooted in how the society portrayed how each gender should behave.

According to Fiske (1993), stereotyping means how one thinks about an individual, based on the individual's status on a group. The society has its own value of how each gender should behave according to what is believed as the "right" value for each gender. The differences between male and female goes beyond just a gender differences into other things, for example, how one should act, think, and feel in the society, based just on their gender. This societal thought is closely related to the traditional culture of each society and the idea of the

dissimilarity of each gender (Eagly, 1987). Male is the one that is expected to be more masculine, strong, and brave, whereas the female is the one that is expected to be more feminine, patient, and soft or in other words, the society has the ability of stereotyping each member of its society.

Gender stereotypes play a high role in determining the concept of women and men and also determining the social categories. (Brannon, 2010). In the other hand, the gender stereotyping issue somehow can cause a negative effect to the member of the society that behaves differently to the society's rule of gender role. One member of the society that acts and behaves differently to what is considered as the default role for each gender can sometimes feel threatened because the society will create a label of the acts as a negative trait.

One of the tools that play an important role in the spreading of this stereotyping of the society is the media. „Woven throughout our daily lives, media insinuate their messages into our consciousness at every turn“ (Wood, 1994). How males and females are portrayed in some types of media may influence or change the society's cultural view toward sexes. Media may portray the gender roles, whether they may pictures the males and females suits to the society's view or as a “good example” of how male and female should act according to the society. On the other side, media may picture them oppositely, in order to deliver critics or sarcasms toward the behavior of society nowadays. „All forms of media communicate images of the sexes, many of which perpetuate unrealistic, stereotypical, and limiting perceptions“ (Wood, 1994).

One of the media that has played an important role in human's daily life is television. Television is one of the media that has a power to deliver information, news, entertainments, advertisings, and other things to our living room. As previously stated by Ballard (1989), television has developed into a huge industry in its sixty years of development, with more than 750 million television sets spread in 160 countries, with average number of viewers everyday approximately 2,5 billion people. Television is also the most attractive media, because it delivers sounds, pictures, and motions, so television is a medium that shows the looks, the behavior, and the voice, choice of words, and intonation of the spoken words. This power of the television is what fellow researchers are concerned about. Since the television channels and programs are held by many people, it is possible that every one may deliver and put different ideas of something into the programs, consciously or unconsciously. Ballard (1989) also stated that our television does not function as a window to the open world anymore, but it has changed into a value-shaping medium that is used to construct the social values.

As the most powerful media, television has a lot number of programs, such as movies, talk shows, documentaries, music programs, and serials, which are part of the social mind reconstructing. One of the programs that has a good rating in the spectator's eyes is the serial. Television serial is another kind of movie, which is quite interesting for some people, because if some movie's storyline will end in approximately two hours, the serial's storyline will end in one season, which usually contains 24 episodes, aired once per week, and it is quite interesting for some people, because they have to wait for the story to be continued in the next

episode of the serial, and usually have deeper details of the supporting elements of the story.

Television serials have a lot of subgenres, and one of them is situation comedy. Situation comedy, or often shortened as sitcom, is a program where the settings of the environment where characters take place to interact are usually the same on most episodes. There are a lot of popular sitcoms, for example “*Friends*”, “*The Big Bang Theory*”, and “*How I Met Your Mother*” that uses real person as the cast, and *The Simpson*, *Futurama*, and *Family Guy* as the example of animated sitcoms. The story that is delivered in old-day sitcoms is not related to each other, but recently, there has been a change made to the sitcoms that make the sitcoms become a narrative serial which story is connected episodes per episodes, and seasons per seasons. (Stafford, 2004). Sitcoms got the public attention from its humor, usually delivered more in a verbal rather than gestural way. And since character change is rarely made, the characteristics of each character made a big impact to the representation and audience impression toward the sitcoms. Characters with gender representation are often found in sitcoms. As Stafford (2004), stated that gender is an important factor determining the characteristics of the characters in most sitcoms, where females were more likely to show in a group.

*The Simpsons* is just like any other popular animated sitcoms. Just like *Family Guy*, *American Dad*, *King of The Hill*, and other family-oriented sitcoms, *The Simpsons* delivers a radical humor by using the interactions of the family members. “*The Simpsons*” was rated as a program with “Parental Guidance”

rating, and the statistics say that it is suitable for age 10 and above (Common Sense Media Inc, 2014). But what makes *The Simpsons* become more famous compared to other animated sitcoms is that *The Simpsons*' sarcastic humor reflected the situation of most American family. Allen (2000) wrote that different with the other series, *The Simpsons* presents a family unit that is all at once unique, achievable, and lovable, and "*The Simpsons may actually reflect the way many families actually live, for better or worse, and is thus culturally pivotal towards guiding the American nuclear family into the future, but it still does not break the traditional rules.*"

One of the studies that addressed this kind of problem is "*Gender in The Simpsons: A Bachelor Thesis*" By Anna-Karin Mattsson (2009), and the second is "*The Simpsons, Gender Roles, and Witchcraft: The Witch in Modern Popular Culture*" by Sarah Antinora (2010). Both of these studies concerned about how *The Simpsons* may shape the gender stereotype, throughout the language used and the behavior of each character themselves. Mattsson (2009) found that the male and female representation in four episodes of *The Simpsons* is often distinguished based on one's gender. Antinora (2010) found that the episode analyzed has issues that constructed the figure of a *witch* in modern settings, and somehow the witch that is portrayed in the episode is still portraying how the viewers may define woman.

However, none of these works are fully concerned about how the choice of words for each gender may unconsciously shape the gender stereotypical feature, as this research does. In the English language, the words can be classified into

content words and function words. Content words are „words which have stateable lexical meaning“ (Crystal, 2008), whereas function words are „words whose role are largely or wholly grammatical“ (Crystal, 2008). In this study, the writer focuses on content words, because content words have definable meaning in case of lexical analysis. Of the four groups of content words, noun, verbs, adjectives, and adverb, the writer focus on the adjectives. This is because, adjective has been noted for determining the difference between male and female, and according to Lakoff (1973), female tend to use more adjectives, especially empty adjectives than males.

In the Simpsons movie, there are many characters. However, the writer chose the four main characters from the Simpsons Family: Homer Simpson, Marge Simpson, Bart Simpson, and Lisa Simpson. The writer chose these characters because that they are the characters that appear the most in the series.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problems**

Based on the background of the study, the writer formulates the problems as follows:

1. What are the most common adjectives used by the female characters?
2. What are the most common adjectives used by the male characters?
3. What are the similarities and differences in the use of adjectives by the male and female characters?
4. Based on the choice of adjectives, how are the male and female characters represented in the cartoon TV serial “The Simpsons?”

### 1.3 Objectives of the Study

Based on the statement of the problems, the objectives of the study are formulated as follows:

1. To determine the most common adjectives used by the female characters.
2. To determine the most common adjectives used by the male characters.
3. To determine the similarities and differences in the use of adjectives by the male and female characters.
4. To determine how the male and female characters represented in the cartoon TV serial “The Simpsons” based on the choice of adjectives.

### 1.4 Significance of the Study

The writer analyzes the gender representation in “The Simpsons” cartoon TV series, aiming to discover how males and females are portrayed throughout the series from the word choice, especially the adjective usage for each gender, this study is expected to give a contribution to the linguistic field, especially in the language and gender sub-field, since this research uses the analysis of word choice of each gender. For a practical contribution, this research aimed to give parents, caregivers, teachers, and other guidance person knowledge of how “The Simpsons” may shape one’s mind of how male and female should act and react to one thing or one another, so that they can decide whether it is suitable or not for their children to watch the series.



### 1.5 Definition of Key Terms

- Gender : The social elaboration of biological sex. Gender is a learned behaviour which is both taught and enforced, and leading to the conclusion that gender is collaborative in the sense that it connects individuals to the social order. Gender is not something we have but that we do. (Eckert, P, McConnell-Ginet, S., 2003)
- Stereotypes : A relatively enduring system of interrelated concepts that inform perceptions of members of certain groups. (McGarty, et. al, 2002)
- Gender stereotyping : Beliefs about the psychological traits and characteristics of, as well as the activities appropriate to, men or women. Gender stereotypes are beliefs and attitudes about masculinity and femininity (Brannon, 2010)
- Adjectives : A major word class, containing words that describe properties or qualities (Dixon, 1999)
- Lexical meaning : Any aspect of meaning that is explained as part of a lexical entry for an individual unit (Matthews, 2007)
- Season (Television Series) : Collection of episodes that is broadcasted in a run, usually in a same year of broadcasting. (TVB.org, 2012)