

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the background of research is elaborated to introduce the social and linguistic circumstances surrounding the topic. Furthermore, the researcher aims to explain the reason why this topic is very crucial to be one of the main foci of sociolinguistic study especially in the scope that concerns language and gender. Thereafter, two questions are formulated in order to limit the extent of this research alongside its statement of problem. Additionally, the researcher also formulates two objectives according to the questions made in the earlier part. Considering all factors mentioned previously, the researcher then expounds the significances of this study by hoping it serves a helpful purpose.

### 1.1. Background of Research

Gender has always been an essential part of human identity. As individuals, living in a society, human behaviour and expressions are determined by the local norms. Then, those values created a system which people use to identify each other as "man" or "woman." Many places only adopt binary categorization of gender. For instance, in various Islamic or muslim-majority countries, it is undeniable that their people must conform to this stereotypical system. They can only be either man or woman. These societies do not acknowledge anything in-between the spectrum of

gender. Thereafter, differences on identity as well as expressions (including the use of linguistic/speech features) arise. Those distinct characteristics are later attributed to both men and women. Both gender identities influence how people speak as Geeslin & Long (2014) claim that, “We also use language to provide information about who we are, the social groups with whom we identify, and the kinds of people we would like to get to know.” Thus, this actively demonstrates that the society wants men to be different than women by mostly putting women in an inferior position with unique typical speech features that are incorporated in their language. However, as modern gender studies reveal that men and women are equal as well as asserting that there are more than two genders, now individual identity becomes fluid, non-binary gender system is introduced, and the movement of transgenderism is on the rise.

Throughout the centuries, the use of language contributes a great impact to human life. As a social creature, the language humans speak and the ideas they communicate create societies with distinct social language characteristics. One of the social aspects which affects how people utilize language is gender. The fact reveals that gender is not only an identity, but it is also something that humans do and perform (West, Zimmerman, and Butler in Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003). In addition, gender is what the society deems as masculine or feminine. It is a completely socially-constructed concept which later is attributed to sex categories. Therefore, different societies have distinct gender values than the others. For instance, in fashion industry, and in many societies across the globe, skirts are meant to be worn by women. However, that is not always the case. Scottish

traditional male attire includes a Kilt. It is a skirt for men and boys that symbolizes patriotism and bravery. As strange as it may sound, symbolic language is arbitrary just like human language. In other countries such as Indonesia, skirt represents femininity and girly behaviour. This cultural difference in how a social symbol, including language, is perceived is the underlying basis of gender. It makes gender a spectrum, or a non-binary identity of a person. As Wardhaugh and Fuller (2015) puts it, "It is also usually conceived of as being on a continuum of masculine and feminine, that is, you can be more or less masculine or feminine." It allows gender change overtime depending on several aspects, such as status and roles in society. Along with the fading notion of gender line, the belief of men and women should speak differently still thrives. In some cases, women are still more expected to "behave" themselves by being polite.

Gender is only a way of understanding and identifying humans through social categorization that is later attributed to sexes. McConnell-Ginet (2011) also asserts similar statement, she explains that, "Sex was to be reserved for biological/bodily classification of living beings as female or male, gender for sociocultural practices, conventions and ideologies clustering around the biological classification." Additionally, anyone may and is able to be a transgender despite the social construct surrounding sex. Some sociolinguists argue that a gender is reliant upon what people do and perform as stated previously. This is a performative view on gender. On the other hand, there is also an essentialist and rather deterministic paradigm about gender which asserts that gender is something that arises from inside a person (Charteris-Black & Seale, 2010). Such statement is reinforced by

Crawford (1995) who claims that, “Essentialism conceptualizes gender as a set of properties residing in one's personality, self-concept, or traits. Gender is something women and men have or are.”

Language and its relationship with gender is a crucial linguistic field for it is incorporated within the daily language use. Along with the fading notion of gender line and the rise of the trans culture, this research aims to identify the women's speech features used by transgenders, who identify themselves as women and their politeness strategies. As briefly expounded in earlier paragraphs, gender is a spectrum. The fact allows people to transition between one gender to another, namely from man to woman or vice versa. However, it does not, in any way, limit the possibility of transitioning to a gender in-between those poles. One can even choose to be agender (not identifying themselves as any categorized gender) or non-binary. This is the fundamental aspect to put into consideration in defining a transgender. Morphologically, the word itself comprises of two distinct parts, they are "trans-" as a bound morpheme (prefix), and "gender" as the free morpheme or its base. As a prefix, trans- represents a sense of "crossing," "beyond," or "moving from one point/state to another." Hence, in the light of this, transgenders can be defined as those who transition between one gender to another or beyond the gender category. Apart from its linguistic definition, Wardhaugh and Fuller (2015) propose a more terminological elucidation. They argue that transgender is, "A term used to refer to people whose gender expression does not match their assigned sex category." The reason why one can change their gender is due to the fact that it is not factually or scientifically inherent to human body.

Nevertheless, human speech features, including that of transgenders, are evidently often affected and can be altered by other people through social interactions, as gender is inseparable from such contact (Holmes, 2006), in addition to the society's normative as well as cultural rules in which individuals live by. It is justifiable that the society along with its construction, influence the use of language. They shape how social statuses as well as the relationship between individuals and even genders play certain roles in determining how language is expressed.

Language has always been a medium for human communication. According to Saussure (in Chomsky 1986:19) language is, “a system of sounds and an associated system of concepts.” These “sounds,” enable us to interact and communicate information with each other seamlessly. This statement is in accordance with the definition of communication proposed by Crystal. He asserts that communication is the transmission and reception of information between any kind of life (2005). Furthermore, Saussure (2013) argues that language expresses ideas and concepts which are attributed to the object it represents. However, language also says something about its speaker. How they use it to express themselves through morphemes, words and later sentences may determine their social position or even character. Similar statement is also asserted by Pinker (2008) who believes that language is a window into human nature. The diverse communicative involvements among language speakers within various social occasions from around the globe has given birth to a huge number of lingual phenomena. Thus, it paves the way on which a field of study is built upon, the linguistics.

Linguistics is the scientific study of language (Fromkin et al, 2000). It covers everything related to language including meaning, sounds, structure, and how social aspects affect linguistic expressions. The latter is the main focus of one of the linguistic branches, that is, sociolinguistics. This statement is reinforced by Holmes (2013), she states the following:

Sociolinguists study the relationship between language and society. They are interested in explaining why we speak differently in different social contexts, and they are concerned with identifying the social functions of language and the ways it is used to convey social meaning.

However, the former belongs to the domain of semantics and pragmatics. Pragmatics examines how language conveys meanings beyond what is said. In other words, to put it simply, it "reads between the lines" to discover implied or hidden meaning intended by the speaker. Doing so requires an observation towards an utterance, or a speech event made by a particular speaker in a specific context. The aforementioned statement is in accordance with the definition of pragmatics delivered by Kroeger (2019). He mentions that, "Pragmatics is concerned with those aspects of meaning that depend on or derive from the way in which the words and sentences are used." In addition, Birner (2013) also contends a similar conclusion which says, "Pragmatics may be roughly defined as the study of language use in context." In accordance with the respective scope of linguistic fields described previously and since gender along with politeness values are social constructions to which men and women are attributed, thus this examination of language is a part of sociopragmatic study. To analyse the sociolinguistic phenomenon, Lakoff (2004) distinguishes the differences of language features used by men and women.

Lakoff (2004) mentions 10 linguistic features which are highly-associated with women or femininity. They are lexical hedges or fillers, tag questions, rising intonation, empty adjectives, precise colour terms, intensifiers, hypercorrect grammar, super polite form, avoidance of swear words, and emphatic stress. As mentioned earlier, it is stated that women use polite form in their sentences. In order to observe the politeness of women's utterances further, she also proposes her own politeness maxims. However, the writer will use Brown and Levinson's theory (1987) on positive politeness strategies to approach the politeness aspect within women's speech. They present 15 strategies regarding positive politeness. Those strategies are noticing/attending to H, exaggerating or intensifying interest, approval sympathy, using in-group identity markers, seeking agreement, avoiding disagreement, presupposing/raising/asserting common ground, joking, asserting/presupposing S's knowledge of and concern for H's wants, offering/promising, being optimistic, including both S and H in an activity, giving or asking for reasons, assuming or asserting reciprocity, and the last one is fulfilling H's wants.

However, this research focuses on women's speech features used by transgenders. In the light of this, the transgenders who are going to be analysed are Caitlyn Jenner and Laverne Cox. Thus, their feminine utterances are the object of this research. The particular reason for this is Laverne Cox and Caitlyn Jenner are arguably the most famous transgenders in America. The former is a trans woman model and a trans right activist who is fighting to erase discrimination towards transgenders. On the other hand, Caitlyn Jenner was a well-known Olympic

celebrity-athlete and the biological father of the Kendall and Kylie Jenner as well as the step father of the Kardashians who own cosmetic and fashion company that dominates the industry. Those achievements bring both Laverne and Caitlyn's name to the public. Therefore, the transgenders are actively invited to various interviews and TV programs to show the public about what they do as well as what they stand for. Through the media, they interact with countless diverse audience coming from different backgrounds. This social interaction, as elaborated earlier, can change people's linguistic expressions. This makes their existence on numerous media platforms may or may have been influencing the speech features used by the audience. Hence, after taking these into consideration, Laverne Cox and Caitlyn Jenner are the appropriate transgenders to be analysed.

Since gender is a part of human identity as well as behaviour (Gal, in Ehrlich et al, 2014), this study is intended to discover whether or not their gender shift from male to female which transgenders experienced plays a role to shape the linguistic expressions used by them and what it means to the study of language and gender in general. In some places, especially in Indonesia, gender or transgenderism is still a taboo subject to talk about. Changing gender identity is considered blasphemy for some, if not, most people. Hence its scientific study has not been well-developed. Therefore, it is a relevant topic for this research because it concerns and is related to women's speech features which are associated with politeness. Furthermore, the "unique" circumstance that they go through make the linguistic feature which they use more fascinating to be analysed.



There are several studies that have been conducted regarding women's speech features. Aini (2016) studied how Katniss Everdeen, the main character of the "Mockingjay" movie uses women language. This descriptive qualitative study applies Lakoff's theory and finds that the main characters, including the male one, express women's language. The data are taken from the dialogues and the script of the movie. Katniss Everdeen as the lead female character shows 7 feminine linguistic features, namely rising intonation, precise color terms, hedges, intensifiers, super polite form, tag question, and emphatic stress. On the other hand, the male character only shows 5 features, they are super polite form, intensifiers, hedges, rising intonation, and tag question. Another research conducted by Murti (2018) examined the women's language and its functions used by Mia in a movie entitled "The Princess Diaries." Using the same theory, this research did not find a complete set of feminine speech features. The study only finds 8 features uttered by the main character. Those are lexical hedges or fillers, intensifiers, super polite forms, hypercorrect grammar, emphatic stress, tag question, rising intonations, and empty adjectives. In the movie, Mia uses these features to start a discussion, to get a response, to express uncertainty, to soften an utterance, and lastly, to express feelings or opinions. Different from those previously mentioned research, Apridaningrum (2018) observes the women language used by Sarah Sechan. The research finds more feminine speech features compared to the aforementioned theses. Sarah uses 9 features namely empty adjectives, intensifiers, lexical hedges, tag question, hypercorrect grammar, rising intonation, super polite form, avoidance of swear words, and emphatic stress. Additionally, research conducted by Sinurat

et al (2021) also observes women's language. The study analyses feminine linguistic features used by Jacinda Arden in her speeches about COVID-19 using Lakoff's theory (2004) with descriptive qualitative approach. According to the study, Jacinda Arden uses 7 feminine features, namely lexical hedges (18,15%), rising intonation (0,89%), empty adjectives (1,19%), intensifier (16,96), hypercorrect grammar (20,83%), super polite form (1,19%), and emphatic stress (40,77%).

As for the research regarding politeness, it has been done by Yuniarti et al (2020). She analyses the positive politeness strategies in the movie "Cat Woman." The study observes the positive politeness strategies uttered by a male character, whose name is Patience Phillips, as well as the factors that influence the implementation of those strategies. Using Brown & Levinson's theory as a theoretical basis, the research reveals that Phillips only uses 5 strategies, they are noticing the hearer, exaggerating interest, intensifying interest to the hearer, using in-group identity marker, and seeking agreement. The factors that cause the use of the positive politeness strategies are intrinsic payoff with relevant circumstances which comprises a social distance, relative power, and the size of imposition. Lastly, the research conducted by Indahsari & Surjowati (2020) analyses the politeness strategies, both positive and negative according to Brown & Levinson's theory (1987), used by Najwa Shihab as the host of Mata Najwa. The data are taken from a Mata Najwa episode entitled "Cipta kerja: Mana Fakta, Mana Dusta." The study shows that Najwa uses 5 positive politeness strategies, they are seeking agreement, asserting of presuppose S's knowledge of and concern for H's want, avoiding disagreement, using in group identity marker, and including both speaker

and hearer to the activity. However, Najwa also applies negative politeness strategies. Namely, minimizing imposition on the other person, questioning and hedging. Another study conducted by Widya (2018) focuses on positive politeness strategies applied by the judges of Masterchef competition show using a theory proposed by Brown & Levinson (1987). In addition, the research incorporates descriptive qualitative method. It found that the judges implement 4 notice/attend to H, 10 exaggerate, 1 intensify interest to H, 1 avoid disagreement, and 2 give reason.

Thus, unlike the studies conducted and done earlier which only focus on biologically born female, to further develop the field of sociolinguistics, this research will examine the women's speech from those who were at first identified as males, then later, females (Transgenders). Therefore, this research can hopefully enrich the study of sociolinguistics in terms of language and gender subject. Additionally, the researcher is not only going to observe the women's language in use, but also its positive politeness strategies to offer a more exhaustive analysis. Taking all of the aforementioned factors into consideration, thus a sociopragmatic research entitled, "Positive Politeness Strategies in Women's Language of Transgenders on YouTube Interviews & TV Shows" is conducted.

## **1.2. Statement of Problem**

The attribution of gender divides and decides how men and women should talk. However, this rapidly changing world finally challenges the once fixed view on

men and women. The progressive, spectral values that currently coexist with the conservatives which maintain the binary opposition of gender in the scope of language is, arguably, a new social state that various countries and societies have today. The latest development of human society definitely offers some changes in how people speak and express themselves despite having a different gender identity that does not match their assigned sex. For that reason, by the existence of transgenders, this research is designed to find out whether or not transgenders adopt the traditional concept of feminine speech, in which politeness is incorporated, into their identity. Therefore, the research questions are formulated as follows:

1. What are the features of women's speech used by the transgenders?
2. What are the positive politeness strategies used in their feminine utterances?

### **1.3. Research Objective**

The general purpose of this research is to improve the domain of sociolinguistics as well as broaden its focal analysis. Furthermore, this is made in attempt to make the field of sociolinguistics more relevant to today's modern world. It hopefully can provide insights for those who want or have interest in the social language study.

By examining the linguistic expressions of the transgenders, the researcher specifically hopes to:

1. Discover the women's speech features used by the transgenders.

2. Discover the politeness strategies, which are associated with women, being used by the transgender.

#### **1.4. Research Significance**

Practically, this research is conducted in order to enrich the study of language and gender in the scope of sociolinguistics. Additionally, this research hopefully can provide insights to those who have the mutual interest for the study of language and gender. Furthermore, the researcher attempts to improve the theoretical focus of Lakoff's theory (2004) on women's language by analysing the feminine speech features used by the trans people. In addition, this research also aims to reveal the positive politeness strategies based on Brown and Levinson's theory (1987) used by the minority.

#### **1.5. Definition of Key Terms**

In this section, various terminologies surrounding women's language and pragmatic politeness are to be explained definitively. It aims to specifically separate mutual terms from other fields of study which may cause perplexity for it is being used in a different context.

##### **1. Gender**

Gender is a socially-constructed identity values that are attributed to the sex assigned at birth. In conservative societies, male persons are gendered as "Man,"

and female persons as "Woman." Since gender is an identity, subsequently it is related to how people express themselves through various means. It is evident that human behaviours, attitudes, characteristics, and linguistic expressions are partially, or even completely, influenced by the gender system. The traditional understanding of gender covers the binary and fixed system that cannot or should not be changed. Nevertheless, numerous modern studies now agree that gender is actually fluid and can change overtime, contradicting the very deterministic nature of the former system. In this case, gender is perceived as a spectrum of identity.

## **2. Transgender**

Transgender are those who identify themselves as a gender that does not match their biological sex. For instance, a man may identify himself as a woman or vice versa. However, this act of transitioning from one gender to another is not limited to only "Man" and "Woman" gender. It allows people to be who they really are and express it the way they deem appropriate.

## **3. Women's Language**

Women's language is a term that is highly associated with the sociolinguist Robin T. Lakoff. To put it simply, it is a kind of language used by women. Terminologically, it is a theory that proposes characteristics of linguistic expression commonly attributed to women.

## **4. Politeness**

The word, "Politeness" generally resonates a sense of behaviours that are deemed good and virtuous by society. It involves a set of ways to fulfill the needs

of the listeners, both physical and mental/psychological. Similarly, Leech (2014) also asserts that politeness is, "... to speak or behave in such a way as to (appear to) give benefit or value not to yourself but to the other person(s)." However, in this research, a more narrowed sense is taken in order to limit the scope of the term itself. In this case, politeness refers to the choices of language expression that someone make to give the listener a space, satisfy their needs, and to show friendly attitude.

### **5. Positive Politeness**

Positive politeness is a set of polite linguistic expressions or utterances that are made to fulfill the listener's need for personal appreciation and approval.

### **6. Negative Politeness**

Negative politeness is a set of polite linguistic expressions or utterances that are made to fulfill the listener's need for freedom and respect.

### **7. Face**

In its terminological sense, face is a psychological concept that refers to a self-image claimed by an individual during an interaction in a certain society. It is highly related to individual's dignity, self-esteem, and social desire that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

### **8. Positive Face**

Positive face is a face or desire for approval and appreciation claimed by an individual or is given by society.

## 9. Negative Face

Negative face is a face or desire for respect and freedom of imposition claimed by an individual or is given by society.

