

# **CHAPTER I**

## **INTRODUCTION**

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

People need verbal expressions to communicate with one another in any speech community. Types of verbal expressions chosen and used for communication depend largely on who is talking to whom (participants), what is being talked about, where and other the conversation takes place (setting) and why such and such a talk takes place (purpose) (see Holmes 1992: 11-14). In everyday verbal communication, every normal person, automatically puts the factors above into practice. They correctly adjust their speech with whom they are talking to, where they are speaking, what information they bring in the conversation and the purpose of having that conversation. Besides, Holmes (1992: 11-14) also claims that the relationship between the participants, the status of each participant, and the formality of the situation influence one's choice of verbal expressions. When people are aware of the factors mentioned above and they know how to express themselves appropriately to others, they will surely be understood and accepted in any speech community.

There is a bundle of types of verbal expressions used in every interaction one of which is politeness verbal expressions, which is the main issue brought up in this study. Politeness in verbal communication is important because it is needed to achieve a successful conversation. Lakoff (1973) as quoted in Cook (1989) claims that in order to maintain a successful communication, one has to obey the following

three maxims of politeness: 'Don't impose' (rule 1), 'Give options' (rule 2), and 'Make your receiver feels good' (rule 3). Obeying these three rules neither the speaker nor the hearer will feel inferior and hence an enjoyable and full of understanding verbal communication takes place. The importance of these three rules has triggered the writer to carry out the study under report.

Both men and women (especially adults) have great influence on other people around them. Nevertheless, in terms of politeness verbal expressions, the writer, a woman herself, is of the opinion that women have a greater influence than men because they are considered as the guardians of society's values (see Holmes 1992: 171-175). This factor influences women's speech style because society expects 'better' behaviors from them in any aspects of life when they speak, behave and even raise their children. Since maintaining good verbal interaction in the society does not only mean to communicate effectively, women are aware of the politeness as the main factor of having a successful communication. This consideration of women as the guardian of society's values has also influenced the writer to conduct the study on polite verbal expressions which are uttered by female characters in 'Desperate Housewives' TV Drama Series.

Above all, in teaching and learning English, politeness should also be taught to the students. The writer thinks that besides accuracy and fluency as the important keys in speaking, it would be better that the students should also be taught how to speak English accurately, fluently and politely (with good manners). Her interest in polite verbal expressions in western culture (in particular American culture) triggers

her to investigate how these people utter verbal expressions of politeness in daily conversation. Since getting in touch verbally with native speakers in the real life is hardly possible for her, the writer decided to choose 'Desperate Housewives', an American TV drama series because the drama series represent a daily domestic life where female characters as housewives in this drama series consider their roles as the guardians of society's value in raising up their children and communicating with other people around them. So, the verbal expressions of politeness which are expressed by the female characters in 'Desperate Housewives' TV Drama Series can be good models for the students of the English Education Study Program of the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education of Widya Mandala Surabaya Catholic University. Besides, 'Desperate Housewives' is one of the most popular TV Drama Series in its demographic worldwide as reported in April 2007 (see: [www.wikipedia.org/desperate\\_housewives](http://www.wikipedia.org/desperate_housewives)) and is also known by a lot of people.

In order to prove that 'Desperate Housewives' TV drama series is popular among the English Department students of Widya Mandala Surabaya Catholic University, the writer conducted a simple survey on 40 students of English Department of Widya Mandala Surabaya Catholic University. The result is that 36 out of the 40 respondents (aged 18 to 23) knew the existence of this TV drama series and 24 out of these 36 respondents had ever watched it. Due to this, the writer was triggered to carry out the study under report focusing on the verbal expressions of politeness uttered by female characters in this drama series. The writer was of the opinion that the students of this Department would be able to achieve successful

conversation, not only for their preparation of being good teachers, but also for their social life in society at large.

To sum up, there are several reasons why the study under report was carried out. First, verbal expressions of politeness do exist in any speech community and are needed for successful communication. Second, usually, women have greater influence than men as the guardians of society's values (Holmes,1992:171-175). This claim increased the writer's curiosity to investigate whether women do use verbal expressions of politeness in communicating with one another. Third, the writer's interest in verbal expressions of politeness in Western Culture (in particular American culture), bring her to the opinion that students who learn English must be able to communicate effectively and successfully. Fourth, having a high proficiency in English is not enough. The students of English have to know the factors that make one's verbal communication effective and succesful. And it is the mastery of verbal expressions of politeness that makes the students ready to communicate successfully, especially when they become teachers of English, later on, when they have to serve of good models for their students.

By choosing female characters, believed to function as the guardians of society's values of 'Desperate Housewives' TV Drama Series, one of the most popular shows in its demographic worldwide and known by most students of English Department of Widya Mandala Catholic University, the writer hopes that the characters and their utterances could be good models for the students in their efforts

to achieve successful conversations now as students and later as teachers and members of the society at large.

Above all, the choice of the study under report was triggered by the fact that so far there has been only one previous study about polite verbal expressions done at the English Department of Widya Mandala Surabaya Catholic University entitled “The Politeness Strategies in Refusing Invitations Employed by Indonesian Men and Women” and no one has used Politeness Maxims as the parameter and ‘Desperate Housewives’ TV Drama Series as the data source. With all the above listed reasons, the study under report with the title “Verbal Expressions of Politeness Shown by Female Characters in ‘Desperate Housewives’ TV Drama Series’ is justified.

## **1.2. Statements of the Problems**

Related to the background of the study, the research questions were formulated as follows:

1. What types of verbal expressions of politeness are uttered by the female characters in ‘Desperate Housewives’ TV Drama Series?
2. What politeness maxims are encountered in the verbal expressions uttered by female characters in ‘Desperate Housewives’ TV Drama Series?

### **1.3. Objectives of the Study**

To answer the above research questions, the subject under report intended to:

1. Identify and describe types of verbal expressions of politeness which are uttered by the female characters in ‘Desperate Housewives’ TV Drama Series.
2. Categorize the verbal expressions uttered by female characters in ‘Desperate Housewives’ TV Drama Series into politeness maxims.

### **1.4. Significance of the Study**

The writer hopes that the findings of this study will contribute to the theory of Politeness Maxims, future researches on verbal expressions of politeness, and students and lecturers of the English Department of this university.

### **1.5. Theoretical Framework**

This study has been based on the theories of Politeness Maxims by Lakoff (1973): (1) “Don’t impose”, (2) “Give options”, (3) “Make your receiver feels good” and Politeness Strategies by Brown and Levinson (1987): Positive Politeness and Negative Politeness.

## **1.6. Scopes and Limitation**

The study under report focused on the two following areas:

1. The seasons and episodes of ‘Desperate Housewives’ TV drama series which were selected and analyzed are season 1 episode 2, season 4 episodes 1, 2, and 3 and season 5 episode 1.
2. The verbal expressions to be analyzed are the language of politeness uttered by the female characters encountered in the ‘Desperate Housewives’ TV drama series. The area of analysis is focused on oral discourse found in the informal setting of ‘Desperate Housewives’ TV Drama Series.

Besides, the study under report suffers from the following limitations (shortcomings):

1. This study is only limited to the analysis of utterances of the speakers. The writer did not do further analysis on the causes and effects happening between the speakers and the hearers in each conversation.
2. The writer could not identify the tone and intonation of the characters’ utterances because she is not able to decide precisely whether the characters’ tones and intonations support the speakers’ polite verbal expressions or not due to the limited research equipments and time. It is not easy to identify the tone and intonation because the writer did not have any sophisticated instruments.

## **1.7. Definition of Key Terms**

It is necessary to define the following key terms to make the discussion clear.

### 1.7.1. Verbal Expressions

Verbal expressions are oral communication which happens between the speaker and the listener to express one's thought and intention together with emotion or feelings.

### 1.7.2. Politeness

“Politeness is the expression of the speakers' intention to mitigate face threats carried by certain face threatening acts toward another.”

(Mills, 2003, p.6)

### 1.7.3. Verbal Expressions of Politeness

The oral communication that happens between the interlocutors in order to express the speakers' intention to reduce the imposition of listener's face carried by certain face threatening acts toward one another.

### 1.7.4. Positive Politeness

Positive Politeness is oriented toward the positive face of H, The positive self-image that he claims for himself. It 'anoints' the face of the addressee by indicating that in some respects, S wants H's wants by treating him as a

member of an in-group, a friend, a person whose wants and personality traits are known and liked. (Brown and Levinson, 1987:70)

#### 1.7.5. Negative Politeness

Negative Politeness is oriented mainly toward partially satisfying H's negative face. It is essentially avoidance-based, and realizations of negative-politeness strategies consist in assurances that the speaker recognizes and respects the addressee's negative-face wants and will not interfere with the addressee's freedom of action. (Brown and Levinson, 1987:70)

#### 1.7.6. 'Desperate Housewives' TV drama series

It is an American television comedy-drama series which tells about a group of women, seen through the eyes of their dead neighbor, as they work through domestic struggles and family life, while facing the secrets, crimes and mysteries hidden behind the doors of their beautiful suburban neighborhood. ([www.wikipedia.org/desperate\\_housewives](http://www.wikipedia.org/desperate_housewives))

### **1.8. The Organization of the Thesis**

This thesis consists of five chapters. The first chapter explains about the background of the study, the statements of the problem, the objectives of the study, the significance of the study, theoretical framework, scope and limitation, and the definition of key terms. The second chapter describes about the theories that are

needed to identify the verbal expressions of politeness and the previous study. The third chapter explains about the research design, the subjects, the research instrument, the data sources, the procedure of data collection, and the procedures of analyzing the data. The fourth chapter reveals the data analysis and the findings of this study. The fifth chapter presents the summary and the conclusion of this study.