

THE CHANGING SENSE OF POLITENESS IN FEMALE CHARACTERS IN MARGARET MITCHELL'S GONE WITH THE WIND

Rendra Bening Prakoso¹

Abstract: Sense of politeness in language is an important aspect in human interaction. Since it is dealing with society, this makes politeness something flexible based on place and time. It means that what is meant by word "polite" is different from one place to another place or even politeness in a particular area changes from time to time. One of literary works that gives a clear description about a society including sense of politeness is Margaret Mitchell's story of the Old South Gone With the Wind. Though it is an old story we still are able to learn something from it about sense of politeness. Gone With the Wind novel took old southern United States society in American civil war era (1861-1865) as the setting of the story, which still adopted patriarchy system. This society had a tendency to clearly polarize men and women's role in the family and society, in which the women should be kind, polite, and gracious. While on the other hand, men, who held the superior position in the society, could express their feeling more freely. This politeness changes when the Civil War comes through this process, there are many changes in the society that influence the rapport. From the beginning when women must speak soft, gracious, and, politely, until the coming of the war, in which

¹ Rendra Bening Prakoso, S.S., M.Pd.<rendra_bening_prakoso_tegal@yahoo.co.uk> +6281325755126 is a lecturer at STMIK YMI Tegal.

they have to leave all their old status as the inferior people. And the last is when the men returned back to their family.

Key words: *Gone With the Wind*, novel, female characters, sense of politeness.

INTRODUCTION

Sense of Politeness in language is an important aspect in human interaction. It is actually an element in language which makes somebody's speech can be accepted or not in the society. Since that it is dealing with society, this makes politeness is something flexible based on place and time. Means that what is meant by word "polite" is different from one place to another place or even politeness in a particular area changes from time to time. Trudgill (1983) stated that language and society are interrelated that it is impossible to understand one without the other.

One of literary works that gives a clear description about a society including sense of politeness is Margaret Mitchell's story of the Old South *Gone With the Wind*. Though it is an old story we still are able to learn something from it about sense of politeness. This novel is a very interesting and popular story. It had been sold for more than 176.000 copies in three weeks after the first publication and in year 1937, it received a Pulitzer award. Later on, this novel was bought by MGM, which made its screenplay, and was very popular, as it had been watched by more than 250.000.000 people in all parts of the world (Mitchell, 2002: backcover).

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THE GENDER ROLE CHANGE IN *GONE WITH THE WIND*

NOVEL

Scarlett O'Hara, the protagonist character who was actually an intelligent and difficult woman was also obliged to follow this "politeness rules." This fact however put Scarlett into a difficult position. As a daughter of the respectable and rich O'Hara family, she has to be gentle, soft, and gracious. Inside, she is Selfish, shrewd and vain. Margaret Mitchell described that Scarlett inherits the strong will of her Irish father Gerald O'Hara, but also desires to please her well-bred, gentle French American mother Ellen Robillard. Her personality makes her repeatedly challenges the prescribed women's roles of her time so that she is not the model of Southern politeness. As a result, she is very disliked by the people of Atlanta, Georgia.

The politeness norm which is described above changed when the civil war began. Since that the men have to defend the country. Women are forced to become breadwinner, or someone who earns money. Thus, it means that they had to work to support their family and confederate army. They did men's job such as working in the cotton field, selling cotton, and became family decision makers. This condition became worse because they had to do their jobs without slaves, who had left their masters. The significant change in Southern women gender role leads to a significant change in their sense of politeness. This change actually cannot be separated from the phenomenon of interrelationship of the society and language.

When General Robert E Lee, the greatest confederate commander declared his surrender in Appomattox, April 9, 1865 (Ver Stegg, 1981:348), the remaining soldiers returned to their houses. This situation made the society readopt the old politeness norm partially. The word partially here means that the politeness norm in the Southern society after the civil war was different from that in antebellum era. This change in women's sense of politeness recognition is influenced by the women gender role change in this novel.

In *Gone with the Wind* novel, Scarlett O'Hara as the protagonist character of the story, is situated in a difficult position, in which, she, as a daughter of rich and respectable O'Hara family was forced to face the bitter effect of the civil war. From her previous society, in which she was trained to be polite, charming, and gracious like the other girls from respectable families, she was suddenly forced by the to do men's jobs, such as working in the plantation, facing enemy army, and keeping her family survive (Mitchell 1940:163). Even, after the end of the war she decided to keep her position as the breadwinner for her family, although the society around her returned to the patriarchy system (Mitchell 1940).

Through this process, there are many changes in the society that influence the rapport. From the beginning when women must speak soft, gracious, and, politely, until the coming of the war, in which they have to leave all their old status as the inferior people. And the last is when the men returned back to their family. The change in sense of politeness of female characters in *Gone With the Wind* like has been described in the novel can be actually seen as the result of their independency level changes.

INTERRELATION IN GENDER ROLE CHANGE AND SENSE OF POLITENESS IN GONE WITH THE WIND NOVEL

Since their early life as a high-class Southern belle, these young women are expected to be soft, kind, and gracious. They are trained by their parents to follow some politeness norms. This norm is not applied generally for all Southern women, yet this training is usually for the high-class women only. However, this is how to differ a respectable woman with those who are not.

The case of how Scarlett O'Hara's mother and nanny to train her is one example. As a daughter of the rich and respectable O'Hara, Scarlett is trained by her mother, mammy, and her school to be an ideal Southern lady. They train Scarlett many things about acceptable and unacceptable behavior and speech including the politeness. The word female politeness in that era means that women especially the young ones have to be weak in order to attract men's attention. This norm, however makes some of Scarlett's behaviors are considered as the impolite ones. Even that this norm is difficult to be accepted by young Scarlett O'Hara, since that she is basically a critical young woman, this politeness norm actually is not the negotiable one.

Scarlett at that time is not fully interested to learn this politeness norm training from her mother and nurse. Scarlett O'Hara knows only the basic but luckily, supported by her attractiveness. Scarlett's attitude at that is more than enough to attract men and this is seen by her mother not as a problem since that this means it can ensure her primary job as a Southern belle that is a marriage. Furthermore, Scarlett O'Hara has learned some effective tricks and politeness norms that must be followed in order to be attractive but not disgracing her family.

When a Southern woman has been successful passing the earliest gender role and is married by a son of a rich plantation owner family. She is now obliged to follow another norm of politeness as a plantation mistress. As a plantation mistress, the woman has to do several jobs at the same time: as plantation manager, mother for her children, and as the assistant and ornamental doll for her husband.

This phenomenon is clearly described by Margaret Mitchell in one character in her novel, Ellen O'Hara. Another unique female politeness example is that the pregnant women are not expected to show their pregnancy in front of public. In fact, ideally the pregnant women shall be always hidden at their homes. In an emergency case when a Southern family has no other choice but to welcome guests at

their homes, they always remind the pregnant women to lift their top hoop higher so that the guests will not notice the pregnancy. Furthermore, Southern people, especially the men, are not expected to directly address pregnancy in their conversation.

Southern men somehow, by death or other factors can leave the women to be a widow. This widowhood, however usually leads Southern women to bitterness in life. In fact, being a widow maybe is the worst thing can be experienced by a Southern woman.

As a widow their expression is greatly limited by the politeness norm. They are not expected to show happiness or interest to other men than their husband. This norm makes it difficult for the widows especially the young ones. Since that this norm is complex and specific while their neighbors are also watching, it leaves almost no space for them to do something the normally young women do. Hence, they will be considered as impolite or even lose their favor in the society if they do something outside of this politeness norm.

Of course, like other examples of politeness norms there will be a kind of punishment for those who do not obey this politeness norm i.e. banishment from their society, just like what has been experienced by Scarlett O'Hara.

That condition starts to change by the coming of the American Civil War in 1861. This condition obliges all able-bodied Southern men to leave their families to defend their homeland. This phenomenon, forces the Southern society to change their attitude including their politeness norm and this change can be found in some female characters' sense of politeness.

Women, who are previously expected to be drudges and ornamental dolls of the rich Old South society in antebellum era, now have no other choice than helping the struggling country to defend. This task means that women from the unmarried belle until those are

married, are now more involved in the society, leaving their previously defined as their primary job in the antebellum era.

For the real example from the novel is in the case of ever-married women who are expected to help the country by dedicating themselves to be nurse in hospitals or raising food and money production in their plantations, this role is getting more and more significant as the war goes by

One example that can be clearly seen in the society is in the case when the war is almost over and the South suffers from famine and defeat. Most women have no other choice than working in the field in order to keep themselves and their family survives.

From the example, it seems that the change is not only in the gender role only. Moreover, along with the gender role change there is also a significant sense of politeness change in the Southern society. This phenomenon also defines that there is a kind From the example mentioned in the appendix, it is clear that there is a simplification in the Southern politeness norm, which is shown in the case of mutual relation between Southern men and women from the higher class.

When the war grows worse the change in sense of politeness is getting more significant. Since the women have to face emergency situation, the society control is now no longer controlling their politeness like what they did in the beginning of the warfare era. Now, they have to give more priority to human survival than watching their politeness.

This change actually affects more to the younger generation, since that they are the present sense of politeness doer and more open-minded to any sociological changes if compared with the older generation. Meanwhile, it seems to me that Mitchell has already found an interesting fact about this inter-generation sense of politeness change and this condition is running until it reaches a new stability point in the post-bellum era.

The end of civil war which is marked by the surrender of the Confederate to Union leaves a reconstruction era in which the remaining Southern soldiers return to their homelands. Although not all the soldiers return to their homes, these surviving able-bodied men contribute a change in the society leading to a new stable point. In this new era, it seems that there are some changes in politeness norm for once more time. The return of men to their homelands provides a choice for women to keep or leave their gender role as family decision makers and breadwinner. In the case of women as breadwinner it seems from the novel that most women are lucky enough to have their male relatives survive from war field do not completely leave their job and depend themselves to their surviving husband, sons, or other relatives otherwise they choose to keep working at least to support, while for those who are not lucky do not have other choice than being family breadwinner. This most significant case concerning of this can be seen in the prior rich and respectable Southern plantation families.

THE ROLE OF SOCIETY IN SHAPING FEMALE SENSE OF POLITENESS

The existence of the Old South Politeness unwritten politeness norm that sense of politeness may determine somebody's relation with other people in a society. Those who follow this unwritten norm will be accepted and loved by the society. In the novel it seems that the word ideal politeness refers to the politeness norm in antebellum era means that this politeness norm is still defined by the people as an ideal Southern politeness portrayal even that most of the younger generation does not follow this norm for any longer.

Otherwise, those who do not follow this norm just like Scarlett O'Hara will be excluded from society. It seems to me that Scarlett O'Hara actually realizes this norm and since that she is one of those who does not follow the norm, she and her family are excluded from the society. Scarlett O'Hara's attitude is actually the result of gender

role change in which she learn from her experience in the civil war era people have to choose between two options: following the politeness norm by leaving her burden as breadwinner to men, so that people will pay a sympathy and she will have a lot of friends or breaking the politeness norm by working to gain money as much as possible so that people will not be able to accept her unmannered attitude. Or in other words, breaking the politeness norm but she will be rich, or following the norm but she will be poor.

Her decision to keep working in order to be wealthy cannot be accepted by Southern people because Scarlett O'Hara is a woman, and like what has been defined in the novel a woman is not expected to be successful in business. The example in the appendix shows that Scarlett O'Hara does not follow the ideal politeness of a Southern lady, as the result she is disliked by the society.

The change of Scarlett O'Hara's attitude finally ruins her family. It seems that war has done too much effect so that she is too afraid of being poor again like in the civil-war era. This leads Scarlett's children to be well cared by Scarlett as their mother and finally it is Rhett Butler himself who reaches his decision to leave Scarlett O'Hara.

CONCLUSION

Politeness norm in a society plays an important part in human daily life. It is a kind of unwritten norm that is agreed by one society. This is actually why every society has its own politeness norm that can be significantly different from one place to another. Just like in the real society, politeness norm like has been described in the novel has its own characteristic that makes it unique.

However this research shows that politeness is not something

eternal. It changes from one time to another based on the situation experienced by the society itself. Whenever most people living in one society agree that one politeness norm is not suitable for any longer with their situation they can change it instantly. Otherwise if there is no a significant change in the society then the change in the politeness norm tends to be slow. Finally, this result shows that there is a strong interrelation between society and politeness norm inside it.

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