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A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF GOSSIP AMONG FEMALE CHARACTERS IN *GOSSIP GIRL SEASON 1*

By:

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Abstract

This study is a sociolinguistic study. The aim of this study is to analyze gossip among female characters in a TV Series entitled *Gossip Girl Season 1*. This research applied the descriptive qualitative method. This study reveals three findings. First, there are four types of gossip occur among female characters in *Gossip Girl Season 1*. Those are house talk, scandal, bitching and chatting. The first rank is chatting since female characters have mutual relationship and close friendship among them. They rarely use scandal because they do not like to judge other women's behavior. Second, there are four speech features of gossip used among female characters in *Gossip Girl Season 1*. They are meaningless particles, neutral words, tag questions, and requests. The female characters mostly apply neutral words as they have many important things that they want to talk about with other women and to continue explaining what happens in the gossip. Meanwhile, they do not use requisite information because they use tag questions when they feel hesitant. Third, there are five functions of gossip among female characters in *Gossip Girl Season 1*. They are to provide information, to give entertainment, to enhance friendship, to influence others, and to make social comparison. Dealing with functions of gossip, on the highest rank is to provide information as the basic purpose in gossiping is to deliver information to other women. The most rarely found is to make social comparison. This suggests that the female characters in *Gossip Girl Season 1* are confident with their personality and identity.

Keywords: sociolinguistics, gossip, *Gossip Girl Season 1*

BACKGROUND

Sociolinguistics is the study of correlations between language use and social structure. It has also been defined as the study of language in its social context (Coates, 1993: 4). Meanwhile, people frequently find themselves creating, hearing, or participating in a lot of comments about someone who is not present in a conversation. It becomes a

need for everyone to gain some information, so they are able to join into a complex social environment as Eric K. Foster (2004: 78) stated that "it is an important social behavior that nearly everyone experiences, contributes to, and presumably intuitively understands". This important social behavior is what people call gossip.

Through a usual conversation, people are able to deliver gossip. R.I.M. Dunbar (1996: 78) states that “studies looking at the content of daily conversations have shown that gossip takes up a big part of people’s communicative behavior”.

Moreover, people do gossiping by using their own language in their society, especially among women. This habit in gossiping is a phenomenon that is appropriate and has many aspects to be analyzed more through a sociolinguistic study.

Gossip appears not only in everyday conversation among American women in a real life, but also in a TV Series. Female characters of *Gossip Girl Season 1* talked about gossip among them. Those female characters are Lillian van der Woodsen, Jenny Humphrey, Blair Waldorf, Serena van der Woodsen, Kati Farkas, Dorota Kishlovsky, Isabel Coates, Eleanor Waldorf, and Laurel. This TV Series is based on the novel with the same title written by Cecily von Ziegesar.

Finally, the objectives of this research are to find out the types of gossip using Jones’s theory (in Talbot, 2010: 75), to describe the speech features of gossip using Lakoff’s theory (in Cameron, 1990: 248), and to document the functions of gossip using Foster’s theory (2004: 80-90)

among female characters in *Gossip Girl Season 1*.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research was a descriptive qualitative. Vanderstoep and Johnston (2009: 166) say that a qualitative research perspective assumes that people cannot analyze and understand an entity by analysis of its parts; rather, they must examine the larger context in which people and knowledge function. There are two kinds of instruments of the research, primary and secondary instruments. The primary instrument was the researcher and the secondary instruments were, in this case, data sheet and the script of the TV Series.

The object of this research was the dialogues uttered by the female characters in *Gossip Girl Season 1* containing and reflecting phenomena of gossip. The data were in the form of linguistic features such as utterances in the form of words, phrases, and sentences by female characters in this TV Series. In collecting the data, the researcher applied attentive observation by Sudaryanto (1993: 133-135). Moreover, the researcher employed the content analysis of spoken words in the TV Series and written text of the TV Series script. Moreover, the data findings of this research were triangulated by some other linguistics students.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Types of Gossip among Female Characters in *Gossip Girl Season 1*

a. House Talk

House talk ranks the third of the types of gossip among female characters in *Gossip Girl Season 1*. From all 45 data, only 8 of them which are categorized as house talk. This type of gossip occurs when the exchange of information and resources connected with the female role as occupation. Women use house talk in order to show that they need support and recognition (Jones in Talbot, 2010: 76).

The following is the example of house talk.

Blair Did we have plans?
 Eleanor Darling, it is impolite to interrupt. **I was just telling Serena that Bendel's is interested in carrying my line.**

Blair Really? Oh, that's fantastic!
 Why didn't you say something?

Eleanor I came back from Paris **early to put together my look book**, and if they like what they see, **it could be the beginning of an entire lifestyle collection.**

(No. 33/EP4/S02/P96)

Eleanor and Blair are pointing to business conversation. In *Gossip Girl*

Season 1, Eleanor was Blair's mother who was back from Paris. However, Eleanor was not only a mother for her, but also she was a businesswoman who had a big influence in the fashion world.

Blair found her mother that morning talking with Serena. She was a little upset because she does not have not any information that her mother would be at home that day. Then, she took her mother to the dining room. She first asked about the plans that they would take if her mother was back. Her mother finally explained that Bendel's brand was interested in Blair's mother's line. It could mean that her mother would take the beginning of an entire collection.

b. Scandal

Scandal ranks fourth or the last. From all the 45 data, it only appears three times. Scandal is a verbal policing or the judging of other women's behavior. It also shows women's interest in each other's lives (Jones in Talbot, 2010: 76).

Blair **Serena's really not here, isn't she?**

Katy That's what I said.

Isabel When you weren't supposed to be talking!

(No. 23/EP3/S09/P69)

Scandal as a type of gossip occurs in above example. It shows a type of gossip called scandal as Blair is interested in the appearance of Serena, her friend.

When Blair, Katy, and Isabel were sitting together in the school assembly in that morning, Blair asked to her friends about Serena as she did not see Serena in the assembly. Serena usually did not late to come to school. However, it was different for that day.

c. Bitching

Bitching ranks the second before house talk. Among all 45 data, nine are bitching. It is the overt expression of women's anger at their restricted role and inferior status. In this TV series, the female characters employ scandal for showing complains and needs to be understood (Jones in Talbot, 2010: 76). It is presented in the following example.

Isabel and Katy Serena's here?
Blair **What is she doing here? She wasn't invited.**

(No. 10/EP1/S49/P25)

Isabel, Katy and Blair were talking about Serena who came to the Blair's party. They felt annoyed as they saw the messages from 'Gossip Girl', a SNS media, told the appearance of Serena inside Blair's party. Blair was sure that Serena was not invited. However, Blair did not know that Jenny, one of Blair's friends, gave the invitation to Serena. In this TV Series, Blair and her friends did not have a good relationship with Serena. They were still mad at Serena as she did not

communicate with Blair when she went to a boarding school outside of Manhattan city. Moreover, Serena made the mistake of coming to Blair's party. Blair wanted to be understood by her friends, and so did her friend.

d. Chatting

Chatting appears the most often compared to the other types of gossip. Among the 45 data, it appears 25 times. This type of gossip is known as the most intimate type of gossip, a mutual self-disclosure (Jones in Talbot, 2010: 76). In *Gossip Girl Season 1*, the female characters usually use chatting to deliver their feelings to each other.

Serena Mom, **I really don't think it's a good idea for me to go to that brunch.**

Lily You promised.

Serena Yeah, **but that was before... before I knew Dan was hungry too. I can't let the boy starve.**

Lily **He's not invited.**

Serena Yeah, that's why I'm going with him.

(No. 21/EP2/S24/P49)

Serena and Lily were talking about a brunch in Chuck's event. Serena did not agree to go alone to this brunch at first. However, she was going with Dan for a reason that Dan was hungry too. The reason that she did not want to go to the brunch was that she would probably meet

Blair there. In the episode 2 of *Gossip Girl* Season 1, Serena and Blair had a problem because Blair found out that Serena cheated with her boyfriend before she went to boarding house. Serena hoped that her mother would not find out about this situation so she just said that it was not a good idea to come to the event. Moreover, she did not want her mother to be worried about the friendship of her and Blair. Her mother was already thinking about Eric, Serena's brother, so she did not want to make another problem to be worried about.

2. Speech Features of Gossip among Female Characters in *Gossip Girl* Season 1

According to Lakoff's theory (1975) in Cameron (1990: 248-251), there are five speech features of gossip. However, there are only four speech features of gossip among female characters in *Gossip Girl* Season 1. They are meaningless particles, neutral words, tag questions and requests.

a. Meaningless Particles

Meaningless particles rank the second. From 127 occurrences in this TV series, 45 of them occur as meaningless particles. This speech feature is the form of lexical items that do not have meaning.

Serena No, **I know...** **I was just...** boarding school... **it's like...**

Blair I don't even know why you went to boarding school to begin with. Do you know how it felt, calling your house when you didn't show up at school and having your mom say: Serena didn't tell you that she moved to Connecticut?

(No. 6/EP1/S18/P12)

The speech feature is in Serena's line. The meaningless particles that are presented in bold type are **I know**, **I was just** and **it's like**. The female character, Serena, uses the meaningless particles to show that she is hesitant about explaining how a boarding school was like to Blair, her bestfriend. Blair wants to know the reason why Blair went to a boarding school and did not give any information to Blair when she was there.

b. Neutral Words

Neutral words rank first. It shows that from 127 occurrences, it occurs 69 times. This speech feature is about words that are possibly used by women although those are usually spoken by men. It is used to convey something important.

Serena Look, mom, I really don't think it's a **good** idea for me to go to that brunch.

Lily You promised.

Serena Yeah, but that was before... before I knew Dan was **hungry** too. I can't let the boy starve.

Lily He's not invited.

(No. 21/EP2/S24/P49)

The neutral words that occur are **good** and **hungry**. Those are in Serena's lines as she says about her opinion of the idea for her to go to the brunch in Chuck Bass' event. When she did not want to go to that event, she made excuses that she would come to that event if Dan was with her. Moreover, the word of **hungry** leads Serena to a reason that Dan had to come with her to the brunch. Showing that her opinions are important, she uses the neutral word of **good** and **hungry**.

c. Tag questions

Tag questions rank third as the occurrence is nine out of 127 occurrences. This speech feature occurs when it does not need confirmation and in a situation between an outright statement or yes-no question.

Serena Mom... mom! Hey.

Lily Oh, Serena, darling.

Serena So, where is he? What? **They haven't let him out, do they?**

Lily I thought you might want to see some of your friends.

Serena Thanks.

(No. 2/EP1/S05/P04)

Serena uses a tag question, **they haven't let him out, do they?**. Serena found that her brother, Eric, was not in the house. Then, she was trying to ask her mother even though she knew that he was not there. However, her mother did not

want to talk about him in that time. Then, Serena became annoyed about it.

d. Requests

Requests rank fourth after tag questions. It occurs four times from 127 occurrences. This category is in the same sense as a polite command and suggests something to be done as a favor to the speaker.

Blair I don't want to see Serena at school and she better not show up at brunch today.

Katy You're really mad at Serena.

Isabel **Please don't get that mad at us.**

(No. 11/EP2/S06/P35)

The request form is in Isabel's line. It is written that **please don't get that mad at us**. The bold sentence shows that Isabel requests to Blair. She hoped Blair would never be very mad at Isabel and Katy. In this TV Series, Blair was very mad with Serena as she did not want to see Serena at school and at the brunch. Thus, Isabel had the request to Blair.

3. Functions of Gossip among Female Characters in *Gossip Girl Season 1*

a. To provide information

To provide information as one of functions of gossip comes first in the rank. This function of gossip occurs as an information change. It occurs 20 times out of 45 data.

Lily **So did you and Dan have fun at the concert last night?**

Serena We, uhm, never made it. **We actually ended up at the 'Kiss On The Lips' party.**

(No. 13/EP2/S15/P38-P39)

When Serena provided information to her mother that she did not go to the concert last night but ended up at Blair's party. At first, Serena asked permission for going to the concert with her boyfriend. However, it ended up in Blair's party. Serena's mother does know that Blair has party that night. By giving this information, her mother knows that Serena went to Blair's party.

b. To give entertainment

This function comes fourth in the rank with occurrences of four times out of 45 data. To give entertainment becomes one of the functions of gossip because it is fun and enjoyable to deliver gossip.

Jenny Wow, Blair, it's beautiful. I mean... **you look beautiful.**

Blair **It's average.** And besides, **Stella McCartney's a much better version of Bergdorf's.**

Jenny Mmm... **I've been meaning to go by Bergdorf's.**

(No. 16/EP2/S23/P47)

Talking about beautiful dress gives entertainment for them. The female characters of *Gossip Girl Season 1* in this datum were Jenny and Blair who were

friends in their school. Out of the school routine, they were able to talk about Stella McCartney's dress that was a much better version of Bergdorf's.

c. To enhance friendship

This third function of gossip comes to the third in rank. It occurs six times out of 45 data. To enhance friendship is about intimacy among female characters in *Gossip Girl Season 1*.

Blair School... so **I guess she's back for good.**

Katy **You knew she was coming, didn't you?**

Blair Course I did. I just wanted it to be a surprise.

(No. 3/EP1/S05/P04)

Blair found Serena who came to her party for five minutes. She did not give greeting, but she could see Serena. It was the same as Katy, Blair's friend. Blair, Serena, and Katy were friends. Moreover, this party could make them realize that it was true that Serena was back. The example shows that they are gossiping about Serena, so it enhances their friendship as they are caring about Serena.

d. To influence others

The second rank in the function of gossip is to influence others. It comes after to provide information. It occurs 13 times. This function is about influencing the listener of gossip.

Blair I don't want to see Serena at school and she better not show up at brunch today.

Katy You're really mad at Serena. Isabel
Please don't get that mad at us.

(No. 11/EP2/S06/P35)

Isabel wants to make Blair never get mad at her and Katy. The situation was that Blair was very mad with Serena so Isabel hoped Blair would not do that to her and Katy.

e. To make social comparison

As the last function of gossip, to make social comparison also comes last in the ranks. It only occurs twice out of 45 data. This function is to increase positive self evaluations.

Laurel **This one missed her cue at the Chloe' Show**, because she was throwing up a pear. **She was in vera's "vogue" spread.**

Eleanor **I don't use vera's models. None of these are right...**

Laurel Well, that's because you're looking at the high fashion look when you should be looking for a new face... You know, **someone who looks good in your clothes. Someone in this book**, like I told you.

(No. 37/EP4/S06/P99)

The female characters of *Gossip Girl Season 1*, Laurel and Eleanor, were

friends in fashion business. In this conversation, they were gossiping about the model at the Chloe's show. The model was also in Vera's "Vague" spread. Laurel compared the model to other models in the fashion book who already became the professional ones. Thus, this comparison will help her to find out the new face that they were looking for.

CONCLUSIONS

With regard to the data analysis dealing with the types of gossip, the female characters in the TV series perform four types of gossip: house talk, scandal, bitching and chatting. The most dominant one is chatting as many women who have close friendships use chatting to deliver their gossip and lowest rank in the occurrences is scandal since they rarely judge other women's behavior.

In terms of speech features of gossip, female characters in *Gossip Girl Season 1* apply four speech features of gossip: meaningless particles, neutral words, tag questions and requests. Here, the most dominant speech features of gossip is neutral words because the female characters want to point out the important things from the gossip and to continue explaining what happen in the gossip. Meanwhile, the speech feature that is not used by female characters in *Gossip Girl Season 1* is requisite information.

Finally, dealing with the functions of gossip, there are five functions of gossip. They are to provide information, to give entertainment, to enhance friendship, to influence others and to make social comparison. The first rank is to provide information since the basic purpose in gossiping is to deliver information to other women. On the other hand, to make social comparison has the lowest rank because the female characters do not compare and evaluate things around their life.

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