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Language change and linguistic etiquette portrayed in the characters of the novel and movie “Memoirs of a Geisha”

¹Atik Ulinuha, ²Tantry Ajeng Parnawati

¹Program Studi D3 Farmasi, Fakultas Farmasi, Institut Ilmu Kesehatan Bhakti Wiyata Kediri, Jl. KH Wachid Hasyim No. 65, 64114, Kediri, Indonesia

²Program Studi Ilmu Keperawatan, Fakultas Ilmu Kesehatan, Universitas Tribhuwana Tunggaladewi Malang, Jl. Telaga Warna, 65144, Malang, Indonesia

Corresponding author: atik.ulinuha@iik.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

Despite the popularity of Memoirs of a Geisha around the world, both the novel and movie go along with controversy. Thus, Japanese culture presented in Memoirs of a Geisha naturally faced some adjustment especially in the way the characters communicate. This study aims to describe the intercultural communication portrayed by the characters of Memoirs of a Geisha. To deal with, a descriptive qualitative method using sociolinguistic approach was employed. The objects were a movie with a duration of 145 minutes and the novel with 448 pages. The intercultural communication portrayed by the characters was categorized into language change and linguistic etiquette. There were 45 language change and 31 linguistic etiquettes portrayed. The language changes found were in the form of both external and internal changes. Meanwhile, the linguistic etiquettes found were in the form of honorifics such as address terms, professional address terms, inferiority, and in-group honorific.

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1. Introduction

Nowadays, there are a lot of movies made based on novels. One of which is Memoirs of a Geisha written by Arthur Golden in 1997. Since the novel was adapted into a movie in December 2005, both the novel and the movie has had its popularity around the world.

Moreover, the novel became a big hit which is available in around thirty languages. Certainly, a lot of movie producers have been able to digitize moving pictures into an outstanding visualization that can assembly the plot very well. However, the semantic gap always exists due to misinterpretation during the watching process when the visual data collected into the watchers' thoughts (Vassiliou in Ismail & Moriyanti, 2019).

Both the novel and the movie of *Memoirs of a Geisha* go along with the controversy. Usually, a story is influenced by the author such as educational background, cultural background, and author's association with his/her community (Shalihah, 2019). It can also be closely related to society since it usually conveys ideas, beliefs, values, and meaning that embraced by society (Puspita & Putri, 2019).

Before he wrote *Memoirs of a Geisha*, Arthur Golden had studied Japanese language and culture in graduate school and had worked in Japan. Even though Arthur Golden had studied Japanese and had conducted a lot of investigations to finish the story, he was in deep thought on how to deliver the story. In his interview for his biography, he admitted that he had been thinking a lot on how to tell a Japanese story to non-Japanese audiences until he came up with a preface which tells that Sayuri, the main character, come to live in New York. Besides, instead of using a Japanese actor, the main lead, as well as most of the actors in the movie, was Chinese. Thus, some cultural platform was negotiated especially in the way the characters communicate to satisfy all parties involved (Guilherme, 2000) such as the audiences, critics, and many others. Hence, it is interesting to analyze the intercultural communication in both the novel and movie "*Memoirs of a Geisha*" because intercultural awareness and intercultural competence will eventually make the *Memoirs of a Geisha* enthusiast be more able to integrate cultural practices in the novel and movie with real-life (Cetinavci, 2012).

The story took place before, during, and after World War II where the unparalleled look and unprecedented cultural change happens due to the great depression and the war. Furthermore, it talks about Sayuri, the main lead, and her vastly changing circumstance. Since the language used to send social messages about personal identity, characters, and background (Shalihah, 2018), thus there must be some changes in the language used in this story. According to Croft (2003), language change is the ability of states to bring together sufficient force to conquer and incorporate other societies, leading to multiethnic, and multilingual societies. Luraghi (2010) also stated that since 1965, generative linguistics has tried to come to terms with the undeniable fact that languages do change, and has focused on inter-generational language transmission as the focus for change. Luraghi's statement is in line with the theory of language change, internal change, where the change caused by history (Wardaugh, 2006). *Memoirs of a Geisha* not only contains internal change but also external change. The external change was portrayed both in the novel and movie because the story was written by a Western writer in the English language. In writing the story, the writer tried to keep the spirit of the Japanese language by using some terms in Japanese to describe exotic objects (Wardaugh, 2006).

Given that the story involves Japanese culture, it is also interesting to analyze it from a linguistic etiquette point of view. Coulmas (2005) stated that Japanese linguistics etiquette is an affair with some consequences. Linguistic etiquette, especially honorific, used in Japanese society plays an important role in speech. Honorific can be easily portrayed in the form of address terms because the use of address terms reflects sociocultural change over time. In addition, Shalihah also (2018) defines address terms as a word, phrase, name, or title (or combination of them) used in addressing someone in writing or speech. The use of address terms indicates the relationship between language and society. It also signals the

relationship between the speaker and the addressee in society. In the Japanese language, using the wrong address terms can lead to a big issue. According to Kasper (2007), Japanese linguistic etiquette emphasizes 'discernment' more than strategic politeness. Consequently, it is good to understand more about why and how linguistic etiquette is used by the characters both in the novel and movie. Besides, a more critical look in the background of movie-making and media science might be a result of a mind-boggling development process which is interesting to learn (Ismail & Moriyanti, 2019).

In all part of the story, pre-climax, climax, and post-climax, those points of sociolinguistics were portrayed. Therefore, an analysis attempts to tell the language change and linguistics etiquette seen in the characters of the novel and movie *Memoirs of a Geisha*.

2. Method

This study was conducted to describe the language change and linguistic etiquette seen in the characters of the novel and movie *Memoirs of a Geisha*. Accordingly, to gain an insight into Arthur Golden's intercultural communication skill in writing *Memoirs of a Geisha*, a descriptive qualitative method was employed. According to Latief (2010), the method or the research design of descriptive qualitative research requires authentic data as the results of the study. Hence, the content data analysis was employed which focused on language change and linguistic etiquette as the variables. The data was taken from the movie with a duration of 145 minutes and the novel with 448 pages. To make it easier in analyzing the data, the 145 minutes movie was turned into a transcript. The researchers themselves as the main instruments of this study then carefully read the novel and transcript. The researchers also made some notes related to the study from the reading. Shalihah (2018) stated that basically, comprehensive reading and collecting the data by taking notes are needed to be done to get detail information from literature. In short, the analysis steps that the writers took:

1. Obtaining the data by reading both the novel and movie scripts
2. Identifying the data in notes.
3. Classifying the data into the types of language change and linguistic etiquette
4. Classifying the language change data into external change and internal change
5. Comparing the data obtained from the novel and the movie
6. Identifying the purpose and meaning behind the language change and linguistic etiquette
7. Analyzing and describing the data by conceptualizing them in the theoretical framework.

3. Results and discussion

From the novel and movie, the data obtained were 45 language changes and 31 linguistic etiquettes portrayed by the characters of movie and novel *Memoirs of a Geisha*. The distribution of language change and linguistic etiquette were visualized in Figure 1. Additionally, to get clear ideas on how the language change and linguistic etiquette seen in the characters, the researcher divided the discussion into two parts: internal change and external change.

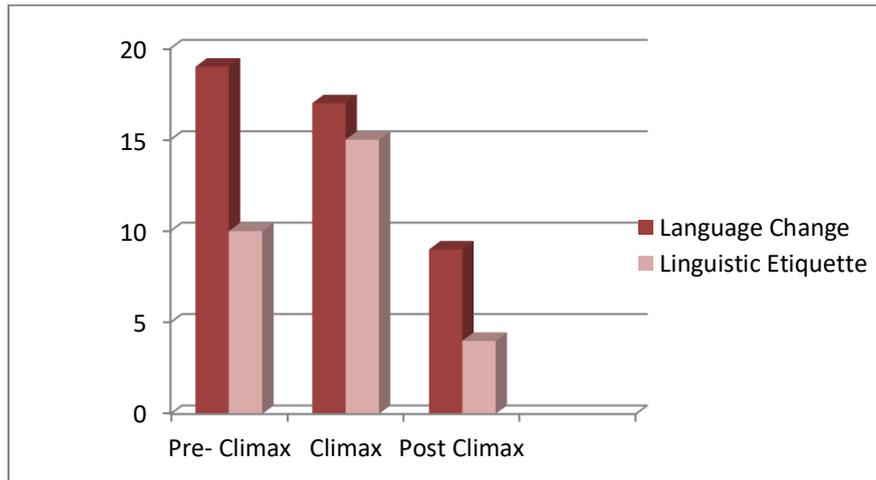


Figure 1. The distribution of language change and linguistic etiquette in the story
Language Change

In both movie and novel *Memoirs of a Geisha*, the data revealed 45 language changes. In general, 19 data (9 from novel and 10 from the movie) were found in the pre-climax; 17 data (6 from novel and 11 from the movie) were found in the climax; 9 data (4 from novel and 9 from the movie) were found in the post-climax. From the data above, the changes were specified into two types of internal change and two types of external change.

Internal Change

From the total of 45 language changes both in the novel and movie, only three of them were in the form of internal change. Internal changes made in the story were caused by accent change and spontaneous act. Internal changes were only found in the pre-climax part to describe the background of the story well. The data and description of the changes were described below.

The most common internal change occurred in both novel and movie was caused by the characters' accent. One of the data, in the novel page 32, a dialog between Chiyo and Pumpkin took place. There, they talked about Pumpkin's accent who was sound like a native of Kyoto whereas actually, she was from Sapporo (*see Figure 2*). This connotes that a language change was made by Pumpkin. This is in line with the theory of language change by McMahan (1994) who stated that we should be careful not to see languages as single entities because language is rather amorphous masses consists of accents, dialects, and ultimately individual idiolects. After all, certain changes must ultimately affect the speaker. Another theory of accent or dialect also stated that starting from the 1960s, sociolinguistics have shown what dialectologist had known for almost a century, that is, that variation cannot be described by drawing precise boundaries (Luraghi, 2010). The change of accent can also be called an innovation made by the characters since it was caused by the change of circumstance. Luraghi (2010) stated that factors that influence the spread of innovation among social groups are connected with identity. Through the use of accent, the readers and audiences are able to identify the character's status within a community. Sadly, this kind of change only found in the novel and cannot be found in the movie. This might happen due to the writer and the actors came from Western and China. Thus, they cannot differentiate Japanese accent since they mostly talked in Standard English only.

Another internal change made was due to a spontaneous act. For example, in the scene 13 line 4-5, Young Pumpkin said '*mitte, mitte!*' to Chiyo when she suddenly found a

skewer food fallen from a vendor's cart and hurriedly took a bite. This language change shown by Pumpkin when she said 'wait' in Japanese was to show her astonishment of the skewered food. She used Japanese to show the exotic of Japan's world. It is also caused by the fact that the word *mitte* was used to show her spontaneous act. This is in line with the theory of Lüdke and Keller (in Luraghi, 2010) which is stated that in a border frame, their hand theory explains language change as due to the sum of unconscious actions by speakers converging in the collective effort implied in the communication, which is a goal of oriented activity. However, the script was written differently in the novel. The novel just described the situation visualized in scene 13 vividly and longer. As a written source, a vivid situation description leads to a better understanding of the novel. On the other way around, the movie can be direct as it seems to be easier for the audiences to escalate their understanding (Bao, 2008).

Data 5

Novel page 32

"Pumpkin, are you from Kyoto? Your accent sounds like you are."

"I was born in Sapporo. But then my mother died when I was five, and my father sent me here to live with an uncle. Last year my uncle lost his business, and here I am."

"Why don't you run away to Sapporo again?"

"My father had a curse put on him and died last year. I can't run away. I don't have anywhere to go."

Figure 2. One of the internal language changes portrayed in the story

External Change

The story presented both in the novel and movie mostly contained external changes. The external changes made in the story were caused by convergence and the act of describing something exotic. There were 9 convergences occurred and 14 attempts to describing something exotic in the story. The data and description of the changes were described below.

Among the other types of external changes, convergence was the most common one. According to Croft (2003), convergence is an adoption of a grammatical pattern of either form or meaning happens. Even though *Memoirs of a Geisha*, was delivered in English, some change of forms or structures of the sentences were made to be more like the Japanese language. Convergence is also called as 'structural borrowing' or 'interference through the shift.' This change was made to suit with the background of the story which was Japan. The change was in line with the theory of external language change by Yang (2000). He stated that sociological external forces clearly affect the composition of linguistic evidence and grammar competition.

The data which contained convergence made in the story was shown in scene 31 line 2-5 when Bekku said "Sisters, yes, from Yoroido" and Auntie said "This one may be. The other one, no." The structure of those sentences did not meet the standard grammar of English. The sentences were made simple to meet the structure of the Japanese language. Another example was shown in the scene 35 line 24 when Chairman said, "Next time you take a tumble, no frown" and in the scene 62 line 4-8 when Hatsumoto said, "She is not ready?" Their lines were grammatically incorrect. However, According to Shoebottom (2017), those sentences are acceptable in Japanese language form because, in the Japanese language, the verb always comes last. On the other hand, although those dialogues are acceptable in the Japanese language, the novel tends to follow English grammatical rule. Differently, a language change in scene 79 line 16-18 was the same as the novel page 79. In

both novel and movie, Chiyo said: "release the tiger from its cage." It shows that she had a gift of expression since she said things differently as others who were blunt. Since she was a famous *geisha*, she should know the art of conversation. The use of the expression in a conversation was considered as an art by Japanese people. Therefore, it connotes a language change in the form of convergence.

Beside of the grammar competition, another form of external changes in the story was caused by the act of describing something exotic. Something exotic in this case is culturally exotic. For example, in scene 20 line 3-6, Pumpkin mentioned the word *futon* for Japanese bed; in scene 14, Pumpkin mentioned the word *obi* for *kimono*'s belt (see Figure 3); and in scene 34 line 1-2, mother mentioned the word *kimono* for Japanese traditional cloth. Both novel and movie presented many other examples of external changes to show something exotic from Japan such as *shamisen*, *maiko*, *hayaku*, *okasan*, *shiomaki*, *hataki komi*, *ekubo*, *mizuage*, *geesha girls*, *gion*, and *zaibatsu*. All in all, the changes were made in line with the theory of external language change by Wardaugh. Wardaugh (2006) explained that a change of language is external in nature to describe 'exotic' objects. Those words mentioned above are only used in the Japanese language and it strengthens the description of A Geisha and the culture.

Data 7

Scene 14

- P = Young Pumpkin
 C = Chiyo
 P (1) If you are not careful, Mother will toss you back onto the street, and then what? You will wind up with your *obi* tied in front.
 C (2) "In front?"
 P (3) You know. A prostitute. Because they spend so much time on their backs.
 C (4) What is a "prostitute"?

Pumpkin does not answer but climbs a wall of a cubby holes like a ladder and put her sandals at the top.

Novel page 51 – 52

When at last I got to my feet and wiped my eyes on my wet robe, the rain had eased to a mist. The paving stones in the alley sparkled gold from the reflection of the lanterns. I made my way back through the Tominaga-cho section of Gion to the Minamiza Theater, with its enormous tiled roof that had made me think of a palace the day Mr. Bekku brought Satsu and me from the train station. The maid at the Mizuki Teahouse had told me to walk along the river past the Minamiza; but the road running along the river stopped at the theater. So I followed the street behind the Minamiza instead. After a few blocks I found myself in an area without streetlights and nearly empty of people. I didn't know it at the time, but the streets were empty mostly because of the Great Depression; in any other era Miyagawa-cho might have been busier even than Gion. That evening it seemed to me a very sad place-which indeed I think it has always been. The wooden facades looked like Gion, but the place had no trees, no lovely Shirakawa Stream, no beautiful entryways. The only illumination came from lightbulbs in the open doorways, where old women sat on stools, often with two or three women I took to be geisha on the street beside them. They wore kimono and hair ornaments similar to geisha, but their obi were tied in the front rather than the back. I'd never seen this before and didn't understand it, but it's the mark of a prostitute. A woman who must take her sash on and off all night can't be bothered with tying it behind her again and again.

Figure 3. One of the external language changes portrayed in the story

Linguistic Etiquette

In both movie and novel *Memoirs of a Geisha*, there were 31 linguistic etiquettes portrayed by the characters both in the novel and movie. The linguistic etiquette mostly discussed the address term and how it was related to the honorific term. It can be seen from the use of the suffix *-san* and *-sama* to after someone's name connotes linguistic etiquette in the form of the honorific term. Coulmas (2005) stated that *-san*, - is a standard form of the honorific title used in Japan. This kind of honorific term was used to honor people who were more superior to the speaker. Moreover, according to Kasper (2007), the unmarked

used of honorific simply reflects the speaker's adherence to accept politeness norms. In one scene of the movie, instead of using the suffix *-sama*, the character was addressed as the great Mameha (scene 76 line 8-9). However, the use of 'the great' in this case was the same as the use of *-sama* in the Japanese language. This connotes linguistic etiquette was changed into a more familiar address term for Western people. Figure 4 depicts the example of linguistic etiquette in the form of honorific terms.

Data 3

Scene 31 line 1-4
 K = Korin
 H = Hatsumomo
 K (1) Sssh. Hatsumomo-san, you'll wake the entire house
Korin spies Chiyo:
 K (2) Your big sister is thirsty. So am I. Go get us some beer.
 H (3) I'm not in the mood of beer.
 K (4) I know what you're in the mood for, and his name is Koichi.
 Novel page 42 - 43
 One night just as I was coming back from taking a drink of water at the well in the courtyard, I heard the outside door roll open and slam against the door frame with a bang.
 "Really, Hatsumomo-san," said a deep voice, "you'll wake everyone

Figure 4. One of linguistic etiquette in the form of honorific terms

The suffix *-san* also followed someone's relationship status such as *Okasan* in scene 34 line 1-2 and *Oneisan* in scene 92 line 1-2. *Okasan* stands for *Okaa* (mother and suffix *-san* while *Oneisan* stands for *Onee* (sister) *-san*. In this case, it can be inferred that the sister was older than the speaker since the address term used was *-san*. Thus, in scene 101 line 19-23 when Sayuri addressed Mameha as *Mamehaneisan* means that Mameha was her older sister. To give clear ideas, Figure 5 shows the linguistic etiquette in the form of honorifics attached in relationship status.

Data 4

Scene 101 line 19 - 23
 S = Sayuri
 N = Nobu
 Ma = Mameha
Ma (19) Quick. Turn your attention to Nobu—
 S (20) (with dread) But Mameha-neisan—
 Ma (21) (rapid-fire) She finds him repulsive. She'd never steal him away.
 Mislead her
 S (22) Perhaps Nobu-san will be kind enough to explain the rules of the match.
 The Chairman glances into his cup. It's only half full. Mameha swoops in, pouring the rest of his tea.
 N (23) Three things matter in life: Sumo, business and war. Understand one, you know them all. But why should a geisha care? You spend your time plucking strings and dancing.

Figure 5. One of linguistic etiquette in the form of honorifics attached in relationship status

However, the suffix *-san* or *-sama* did not follow someone's title. For example, to honor Mr. Chairman, the suffix *-san* or *-sama* was not attached to him, the suffix *-san* should not be attached to professional titles such as *sachō* (chairman of the company). In addition, a doctor was called *dr. Crab* without any honorific term because *sensei* (professor, teacher, or doctor) is a professional title who does not need any honorific address (Coulmas 2005). Figure 6 presents the example of linguistic etiquette in the form of professional title.

Data 6

Scene 58 line 7-8

G = Geisha
 C = Chairman
 G (7) Mr. Chairman, shouldn't we hurry? We'll miss the beginning.
 C (8) we see the Spring Dances every year, we can spare a moment.

Novel page 71

"Why, she's only a maid! Probably she stubbed her toe while running an errand. I'm sure someone will come along to help her soon."

"I wish I had your faith in people, Izuko-san," said the man.

"The show will be starting in only a moment. Really, Chairman, I don't think you should waste any more time . . ."

Figure 6. One of linguistic etiquette in the form of professional title

Another kind of suffix used in both novel and movie was *-chan*. This suffix can also be indicated as an address term used for people who were younger or more inferior to the speaker. Coulmas (2005) stated that one of the parameters on which the norms for proper honorific speech is inferior (i.e., relative status). In both novel and movie, the characters' sometimes did not use any suffix after one's name. Addressing someone by name only indicates intimacy. Kasper (2007) stated that linguistic etiquette is both a highly context-sensitive aspect of human communication and one that shapes context and participants' relationship. This linguistic etiquette can also be categorized right as Kasper's theory of politeness. Furthermore, politeness is not only determined by the current state of the conversational contract but also a context-creating and modifying force in its own right. In other words, addressing someone by name only can be considered as a close relationship between speakers. Also, honorifics are inappropriate when referring to in-group members toward outsiders (Coulmas, 2005). Thus, when the character addressed another character using the name only, it can be considered that she or he knew the other speaker very well.

4. Conclusion and suggestions

In all part of the story, pre-climax, climax, and post-climax, there were 45 language changes and 31 linguistic etiquettes found. The language changes found were in the form of 5 internal language change and 40 external language change. External change dominates the finding of language changes. However, not all language changes were found in the novel. 26 out of 45 data of language changes were found in the movie since the language changes can be identified clearly in spoken language. Meanwhile, the linguistic etiquettes found were in the form of address term, professional address term, and in-group honorific. Different from the language changes, all the linguistic etiquettes found in the movie were in line with the finding in the novel which can be meant that the words cannot be transferred to other languages. Delivering a cultural related story to readers from the different story is a

challenge for writers. Although the languages can be translated into other languages, it might differ in meaning or lose the essence of the word itself. Additionally, some specific term of language such as the linguistic etiquettes of Japanese might not be used in other languages. Thus, the linguistic etiquettes in the movie conform the novel.

In conclusion, the internal language changes found in this analysis supports the theory of Luraghi (2010), Wardaugh (2006), and McMahon (1994). The external language changes found in this analysis also in line with the theory of Luraghi (2010), Wardaugh (2006), and Croft (2003). At last, linguistic etiquette in the form of honorific found in this analysis supports the theory of Kasper (2007) and Coulmas (2005).

Consequently, future researchers are suggested to conduct a deeper investigation of the use of language change and linguistic etiquette in other literature work. Future researchers are also suggested to conduct an advanced study on language change and linguistic etiquette practiced in certain communities. A deep study on the implementation of language change and linguistic etiquette in certain communities will give a deeper understanding of the use of language change and linguistic etiquette.

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