

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The topic of this thesis is miscommunication in Amy Tan's novels. Miscommunication may happen in our daily life. In uttering words, people can have different points of view about the same thing. Those different points of view can lead to misunderstanding. One of the causes of miscommunication is different cultural backgrounds. Two people from different cultural backgrounds, for example American and Chinese, can have miscommunication even though they speak the same language. When an American speaks something considered polite in the American culture, it might be considered rude by a Chinese. The Chinese might get mad, but the American is not aware of it. This condition might happen in our daily life, though we probably do not realize it.

Culture is an important aspect which cannot be separated from one's life. When a person thinks, speaks or does something, there must be some elements of culture involved. One of the most essential elements of culture is language. Because man is not able to live alone in this world, it is important to avoid

miscommunication. People must learn how to interact with others at work, in school, or even in their family. Those are the reasons why I am interested to analyze miscommunication caused by ignorance of cultural backgrounds besides finding out whether their act is face-saving or face-threatening to someone they are talking to.

Hopefully, by reading my thesis, readers can learn how to avoid miscommunication due to ignorance of cultural backgrounds. Therefore, I feel challenged to give readers a better insight about communication through my thesis. Owing to the fact that there are so many different cultural backgrounds in this world, I will limit myself only to Chinese and American cultural backgrounds found in Amy Tan's novels. By having some knowledge of Chinese culture, the readers may have a better understanding of the story. Hence, I have decided that my thesis topic will be "Miscommunication in Amy Tan's Novels The Joy Luck Club and Kitchen God's Wife".

I only choose Chinese and American cultural backgrounds because they are two countries with so many varieties of culture. When China was at war with Japan, many Chinese moved to America to start a new life. Although they live in America, they cannot easily forget their Chinese culture. In fact, many Chinese people live in America nowadays. Although they speak the same language, it does not mean that they have no miscommunication among themselves.

Chinese and American cultures have different characteristics. Chinese culture tends to be traditional and conservative, whereas American culture tends to be contemporary and radical. These differences lead to the miscommunication. The merging of two cultures forms a uniqueness. Since people have to

communicate with each other, miscommunication is unavoidable (http://web.hkv.hk/-h9804756/Monkey_King.html).

Referring to communication, the same utterance can be interpreted differently, depending on the speaker's intention, whether the speaker is uttering a request, a statement, or something else. Linguistics deals with this kind of phenomenon, especially Pragmatics. Therefore, I think the appropriate linguistic area to use in my thesis is Pragmatics. To make the theories more specific and relevant, I will focus on the part of Interactional Sociolinguistics, namely the theories of John Gumperz and Erving Goffman. This approach deals with the science of man (anthropology), sociology, and linguistics (the language). Specifically, Interactional Sociolinguistics is concerned with the study of culture, society, and language.

The fact that I choose a story about a Chinese family who live in America means that my discussion deals with Sociolinguistics. Sociolinguists concern themselves with the linguistic behavior of groups of people; for them language is a property of a social group, rather than of an individual (Labov, 1994).

In writing this thesis, I decide to choose one method. Since my data are taken from novels, I use library research to find out miscommunication. Those novels are The Joy Luck Club and Kitchen God's Wife by Amy Tan. I choose these two novels because they are so full of miscommunication in the conversation between characters. The characters, both in Joy Luck Club and Kitchen God's Wife, are from two generations, the mothers and the daughters. They have many different points of view about life which result in

miscommunication. To support my analysis, I also search several theories about cultures which are taken from textbooks and the Internet.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

I have formulated several research questions as follows:

1. What is the miscommunication found in each novel?
2. What are the causes of the miscommunication?

1.3 Purpose of the Study

This study is carried out:

1. To show the miscommunication found in each novel.
2. To show the causes of the miscommunication.

1.4 Method of Research

First, I begin by reading Amy Tan's novels, The Joy Luck Club and Kitchen God's Wife as the primary texts. Second, I analyze the miscommunication which happens because of two different cultural backgrounds. Then, I read some references that are relevant to the topic. The theories used to analyze the data are taken from textbooks and the Internet. Furthermore, I compare the theories that I have learnt and the application of the theories in analyzing these two novels. Finally, I draw some conclusions from my analysis.

1.5 Organization of the Thesis

The thesis is organized into four chapters. It begins with Chapter One, the Introduction, which contains the Background of the Study; the Statement of the Problem, the Purpose of the Study; the Method of Research and the Organization of the Thesis. Chapter Two contains the Theoretical Framework of the study. Chapter Three contains the analysis of data taken from The Joy Luck Club and Kitchen God's Wife. The last chapter is the Conclusion, which sums up the main points of what has been analyzed and discussed in the previous chapter. At the end of the report I include the References and also the Appendices, in which the whole data and their sources are listed.