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Corona Pandemic, Foreign Terminology, and Society Symbolic Interaction Seen through Memes

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ABSTRACT
The Indonesian government policy to prevent the spread of Covid-19 has been interpreted in many ways by its society. One of the reasons is the use of English terminology when issuing the regulation. As a consequence, there are the appearance of lots of funny memes showing how society understands the government policy. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the foreign terminology used by the government followed by English terminology that was spread that was spread addressed to Indonesian who cannot speak English in major. This study uses descriptive qualitative method; as and the main data are the memes found in social media. These memes are analyzed linguistically using phono-orthography perspective to know about the cognitive acquirement of people in Indonesia. The next step is by having a sociological perspective using by having sociological perspective using symbolic interaction theory to acknowledge the social interpretation of the English terminology.

Keywords: Memes, Pandemic, phono-orthography, symbolic interaction, social interpretation

INTRODUCTION

The world has been facing a corona pandemic called Covid-19, especially Indonesia which becomes the fourth large number of people got infected (Hamid, 2020). People's mobility is one of the biggest problems as the virus is spread from the droplets.

Therefore, the preventive actions are taken. The government strongly recommends people who got virus exposure but not yet infected to do self-quarantine for at least 14 (fourteen) days at home or isolated place. They also have to stay away from the other healthy people at least one meter away. Wearing a mask is also a must. The other strong alternatives are having the country impose lockdown as a part of the self-quarantine.

The consequences are in a huge impact. People have no choice but stay at home; students learn from home (LFH) by having a sudden online class; for those who live in the city it is quite affordable, in contrast to those who live in suburban has a struggle with connection (Jakarta Globe, 2020). Also, most employees do the work from home (WFH) suggested by the president by having the same case as students, doing online conferences; in contrast it will not happen for unsettled workers (Jakarta Post, 2020).

However, not many Indonesian have a privilege to understand English that is not a second language but it is still part of a foreign language. As it is Jakarta, Jogjakarta, Medan, Surabaya, and other big cities that have already had many International schools, but but still the majority is that Indonesian are not familiar with English. So, how do they understand the government policy concerning the corona pandemic?

The terminology of Work from Home (WFH), Learning from Home (LFH), Lockdown, Quarantine, Pandemic, and any other more are not familiar to Indonesian. Therefore there are some misunderstandings about its semantics and pragmatics, even the way these will create a discourse. Weizman in Sayer says that the communication happens when the I-level speaker talks to We-Level speaker (Sayer: 2012). The former is as the individual speaker and the latter is as the collective speakers. They can share a misunderstanding since I-level speaker shares the direction of an exchange to the We-level speakers.

As the government of Indonesia gives the foreign terminology to Indonesian, they can be called as the I-Speaker and Indonesian is We-Speakers. The problem is not all We-Speakers speak English fluently as English is even part of the foreign language. Thus, in this case, there are many misunderstandings arise concerning corona pandemic policies from the government.

In this times, there are lots of advice, suggestion, and recommendation from the government both from the center and local government telling people should *stay at home, work from home, learn from home,* doing *quarantine,* and considering *lockdown.* Those terminologies are used roughly to Indonesian from Sabang to Merauke. In this case, both parties do not consider Indonesia as diversity especially on language. The information will not reach the people who diversely speaking hundreds of local languages.

As a result, memes emerging in social media containing funny, irony, even sarcastic contents relating to the terminology offered by the government cannot be understood. The memes as the objects of the research are found in the website. It is because social media has attractive pictures and people are easy to access. According to Miriam Webster Dictionary, meme defines as "an idea, behavior, style, or usage that spreads from person to person within a culture."Furthermore, Dawkins argues that the terminology of a meme originating from a gene. He said that "it is equivalent of a gene therefore anything gets passed from brain to brain, like an accent, or a basic word, or a tune" (Fazal: 2018). As it is within culture, so it is spread culturally.

This study, therefore, would like to analyze the foreign terminology used by the government followed by English terminology that was spread to Indonesian who cannot speak English in major. There is one research question in this study; how do memes represent a symbol of acquiring meaning seen through symbolic interaction? This study uses descriptive qualitative method as the main data is the memes found in social media. These memes are analyzed linguistically using phono-orthography perspective to know about the cognitive acquirement of people in Indonesia. The next step is applying symbolic interaction theory to acknowledge the social interpretation of the English terminology.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Phono-Orthographic Confusion

People in Indonesia who consider English as their foreign language are only familiar with English words on most occasions however they do not understand the exact meaning of the words (Wijayanti, et al: 2019). Therefore, they likely assume what they hear and what they read are the same (Soeparno: 2005). Further, Bloomfield (2010) also says that cognitive demand is needed when listening to a foreign language as it needs proficiency at a high level and the capacity of working memory also plays an important role in how non-native English people collect the information.

Unknown vocabulary is also the biggest problem for Indonesian although they might have heard and read the words on occasion, such as from Internet, gadgets, signboards along the high way, or restaurant both local and international ones. However, there is an overlap

between unfamiliar terms and the vocabulary of the spoken text (Kurita: 2017). To conclude, Indonesian mostly misheard the terminology that they think they have heard and read before. Sthar in Kurita states that spoken language is described by the mingling of unclear articulation making lexical units as written form are ignored for a while; therefore the lack of clarity is the obstacle for non-native English speakers (Kurita: 2017).

The phonological aspect happens when the spelling-to-sound phenomenon achieve in Indonesian. They tend to have difficulties in pairing the words with similar spelling and pronunciation (Dangin in Treman, et al: 2018).

Concept of Intercultural Discourse

English vocabulary contains many verb-phrases that offer various meanings and concepts. Indonesian perceive the English language as translated roughly to their language. They have their own culture, so does English. Thus, when these two cultures, hardly any smooth assimilation happens. Piller says that we belong to intercultural as we live in distinctive cultures in the same place and community and we combine them (Piller: 2012). English language though part of the foreign language in Indonesia becomes the most frequent language found in daily life and activities in almost every part of Indonesia.

The consequences when one culture encounter others are the potentials of misunderstanding. In many cases, it happens in Indonesian as they do not understand the concept of the terminology and roughly translate it in the Indonesian language without knowing about the essence. Further, Hinnenkamps in Piller says that there is an urgency to explain to global about the differences between members of different speech communities and linguistic origin (Piller: 2012). Every misunderstanding should be confirmed therefore there is no more misguiding of the learning process.

Symbolic Interaction in the Society Interpretation

This theory explains how symbols perceive meaning based on Sociological perspectives. It is part of micro-level theoretical While the interaction of symbols shows that the perceiving meaning is based on the human interaction and how they interpret the symbol. Besides, Aksan, et al. say that meaning is achieved from the interaction among people and it leads people to form their sensory world (Aksan, et al: 2009).

Language is a part of a symbol that is classified as the rules to communicate (Redmon: 2015). Language plays an important role to deliver symbols. Delivering symbols to society is what should be taken care of by the language so that it can be proper and effective to the society to whom it receives. Whether the society thoroughly understand or even they lost the information at all.

Symbolic interaction changes its attention to the construction of subjective viewpoint and how individual in society makes sense of their world from their distinguish perspective (Carter & Fuller: 2015). Noting that individual is part of the community and how it will adapt to what social and formal institutions instruct them to do. Symbolic interaction theory is used in this study to explain society as a big community constructs what makes sense for them to receive essential information relating to the prevention of Covid-19 spread.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Spelling-to-sound Gap

Corona pandemic with its sudden coming makes society and government decide sudden policies. These sudden policies somehow change dramatically after its first airing to the public making people feel confuse on how and which to believe the information. This phenomenon also risks people having various interpretations about what government, community, and media tell them to do.

The problem is that the Indonesian government, communities, and media like to use English as their language platform to share and socialize people what and how to do during this Covid-19 pandemic, as the virus official name says so. As a result, there are error spelling, irony, and funny slogan and sign created by the people during this pandemic situation.

The figure 1. shows how Indonesian roughly interpret the information from the government, communities, and media.



Figure 1.

Figure 1 shows a limited knowledge of English vocabulary. Indonesian might hear the word *lockdown* several times in many media and even face-to-face meetings, both online and real meetings. However, the lack of confirming the spelling and the urgency to take any action, in some places, people have misspelled the terminology becoming *download* and *slowdown.*

On one hand, it is amusing to see that Indonesian has their way to perceive English words. They might be familiar with several words as *download* that emerges frequently in their daily language. It is because technology development brings English as the main terminology in every aspect. Also, people are getting along with the word *slow* as the meaning is to always calm down. In this case, Indonesian is familiar with part of the word *down* therefore they use any words containing *down* words, such as *slowdown* and *download* rather than *lockdown.*

Indonesian is not familiar with the word *lock* although it is shown up frequently in the goods surrounding them, such as household equipment (tumbler, lunch box, dispenser, and many more. As a result, the word *lock* is less frequently heard by Indonesian.



Figure 2.

The picture informs the phenomenon of spelling-to-sound criteria. Indonesian who consider English as their foreign language listen or hear what they think they hear by ignoring the orthography aspect. The sound *down /dʌʊn/* is pronounced as don't /don/ that should be *don't /dəʊn/*. as a consequence, the world *down* results in *don't* becoming *lock don't.*

The other data are shown in the viral conversation via Wassap uploaded to the website between Sundanese mother and son relating to the terminology *lockdown.* Here is the text written in Sundanese:

> *"BU!!. Ti kamari mam teh hayo weh lauk!! Mun henteu lauk dadaunan, kadang lauk dibungkus daun."* (Mom, starting from yesterday the side dish only!! if not vegetables side dish, it must be dish wrapped with leaves (daun)).
>
> *"Ibu teh nyaah ka Apa, alam apa kaserang corona. Seueur nu nyarios supados teu kaserang corona kedah Lauk Daun!"* (I only follow the rule, the nature suffers from Corona. Many people say those who get infected should eat side dish (lauk) with leaves (daun))
>
> "*Hmmmmmmmmm. Lockdown, Bu. LOCKDOWN sanes Lauk Daun.* (Hmmmmmm, Lockdown, Mom. LOCKDOWN, it is not Lauk Daun) *Oohhh Lockdown. Di mana eta the meserna?* (Ooooh, Lockdown. Did I hear it somewhere?)
>
> *"Kumaha ibu we ah....Lieur!!! Ieu Apa leuwih-leuwih ti kaserang corona kieu carana mah!!!"* (What to do ah..like I care!!! If it is like that instead Corona will attack us!!!)

From the conversation, there is a funny moment yet sad because people especially the mother does not understand what the government asks them, to have private lockdown in their own house. The son tries to make it right by pronouncing the word *lockdown* accentuated in the sound /lɑ:k/ with tense vowel that is heard as /lɑwk/ therefore becoming lauk /lɑʊk/ meaning side dish. The same case happen in the sound /dɑʊn/ that is supposed to be lax vowel /ɑʊ/ becoming tense in Indonesia /ɑʊww/ means /dɑʊwn/ or daun or leaf. As a result the mother thinks that they should eat all the dishes from vegetables or leaf vegetables to avoid coronavirus instead of being lockdown at home.

People react differently to the phenomenon of *lockdown* terminology although they have already understood the concept to lock their area down. To limit the physical interaction, they also limit the activity of their area from outsiders. However, memes have shown that they acquire the terminology differently based on the chunk of words they have already known,

which is *down.* As a result, they improvise the word *down* with any other verb phrases becoming *lock don't, slow down,* and *download.*

Society Interpretation

"Meanings emerge from interactions with other individuals and with society" (Carter & Fuller: 2015). People interact with each other to get the meaning and to acquire some knowledge to share to others. The meaning is shared by the symbol. The symbol is represented by the language used by the speakers and the listeners. One common institution called government gives policies to its society is a part of the interaction. The government takes a fancy to share meanings to the people relating to the prevention of the Covid-19 spreading. The meaning is shared by the use of several English vocabulary. One of them is *lockdown.* Although *lockdown* is not the settled policy used by the government to do the prevention, more people have already received the information. They obtain it through the media by informing it in a negative form; Government will not implement *lockdown.* Still, the negative form creates meaning to society. The most frequent terminology becomes the symbol and that symbol creates meaning that can be freely interpreted by society.

Thomas in Aksan says that the interpretation can be wrong but that is not significant. It is essential on how people perceive the symbol and create meaning (Aksan: 2009). Indonesian society in every community acquires the policy in various output. *Lockdown* is understood as being locked in a particular place that can be at home or region or country so that other physical interactions can be minimized.

The pictures show the society's understanding of the word *lockdown* in various results. While one community recognizes it as the activity of downloading, the other communities say it as the activity of being slowdown. Though, in general, they acknowledge the meaning as the activity of limiting the physical interaction, people interpret the terminology in terms of its orthographic aspect. They acquire the cognition of those words into the familiar terms that they have experienced with. The term *lockdown* can be found in many board signs, websites, gadgets, social media, and online activities.

The improvisation done by Indonesian is part of the symbolic interaction (Goffman: 1958). Society adjusts the regulation humorously as they familiarize themselves with a chunk of language. This chunk of language symbolized the people cognitive acquiring the English terminology. They interpret the concept of locking down their place by having certain funny terminology shared through memes. Ironically, it is the outcome of people in Indonesia that mostly consider English as a foreign language. Also, it happens in working-class areas showing the majority of the class that does not use English as their second language.

CONCLUSION

Indonesian considers English as their lingua franca. It means that they do not use English in their formal occasions such as official language in education, politics, and other institutional areas. Relating to the pandemic situation, the government is expected to share the policy in an effective way that all of the layers in society can understand thoroughly. However the use of English terminology has made society interpret it differently, especially in terms of acquiring the proper English spelling and exact word. The word *lockdown* is interpreted as *slowdown, download,* and *lock don't.*

Symbolic interaction theory explains the social interpretation to understand government policy. It is known that society does the improvisation when interpreting the policy. The improvisation can be seen through the way society uses familiar words *down* to connect it with other chunks of words, though they do understand the concept.

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