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Linguistic functions of emoji in social media communication

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Abstract

This paper aims to discuss the emoji linguistic function in conversations on WhatApps social media. This paper uses Barthes and Morris's semiotic approach. Data collection methods are the distribution of questionnaires online, and photo documentation (screenshot) of conversations using emojis on WA social media. The results of the study concluded that emojis are part of the grammatical elements of language in communicating on social media. In conclusion, semiotic, emoji is a sign vehicle, designatum, and interpretant relation that produces syntactic, semantic and paradigmatic emoji dimensions of signs as a linguistic function in social media communication.

Keywords: Emoji, Sign, Syntax, Semantic, Paradigmatic

Funciones lingüísticas de emoji en la comunicación en redes sociales

Resumen

Este documento tiene como objetivo discutir la función lingüística de emoji en conversaciones en las redes sociales WhatApps. Este artículo utiliza el enfoque semiótico de Barthes y Morris. Los métodos de recolección de datos son la distribución de cuestionarios en línea y la documentación fotográfica (captura de pantalla) de las conversaciones usando emojis en las redes sociales de

WA. Los resultados del estudio concluyeron que los emojis son parte de los elementos gramaticales del lenguaje en la comunicación en las redes sociales. En conclusión, semiótico, el emoji es un vehículo de signos, un diseño y una relación interpretativa que produce dimensiones emoji sintácticas, semánticas y paradigmáticas de los signos como una función lingüística en la comunicación de las redes sociales.

Palabras clave: Emoji, Señal, Sintaxis, Semántica, Paradigmática

1. INTRODUCTION

Data from the Association of Indonesian Internet Service Providers (APJII) shows that 132.7 million Indonesians are internet users or more than 50% of the total population of Indonesia, namely 256 million Indonesians. Of these, 52% of internet users are male and 48% are female. The interesting thing is the internet media content that is most frequently visited. 83 million (63%) users use social media (Facebook, Instagram, and WhatApps) in communication. The reason they use the internet media is updating information (31 million people), 28 million people looking for information about work, 18 million people spending their free time, 14 million people socializing, 12 million users looking for information about education, 12 million people are looking for entertainment and 10 million users doing business and searching for goods (HASYIM, 2018).

Advances in information technology in this era have changed the way of thinking of the world community. The results of a survey

conducted by HASYIM (2018), showed that to put their children to sleep, mothers in the UK tell a story or fairy tale through tablet media. To grow children's shariah to eat, mothers show stories of children's animated videos that are being loved by children through Youtube (HASYIM, 2018). According to FAN (2006), in the US about 40% of children aged 3 months routinely watch TV, DVD, or video via the internet, and at the age of 24 months, the figure increases to 90%. DANESI (2017) said that language development in infants is lower than babies who are always exposed to online media. Research conducted by HASYIM (2018) in the US states that social robots (human robots on line) have a positive impact on children's language development.

Visual language has dominated the communication of internet users on social media and the visual language that is widely used in conveying messages is emojis. Various research results state that emoji as a visual language is used to express something (feelings and thoughts). According to MORRIS (1938), 49% of the text used in social media is emojis, and emojis are a more practical visual language used in conveying messages and expressing feelings and ideas. The results of Jibril and DANESI's research (2017) state that emojis are used as non-verbal sign language, and face-to-face interactions, as well as one's self-expression that is displayed through emoji language in conversation texts.

Conversations on social media use verbal and non-verbal texts (emojis) to express emotions and explain the sender's meaning. However, the language phenomena found show that emojis not only

function as a visual language in conveying emotions and thoughts but have become part of the structure of the text. Conversational sentences used in social media no longer pay attention to punctuation. However, the sentences end with an emoji as a closing sentence. Punctuation as a symbol to indicate the structure and organization of a writing, as well as the intonation and pauses used by the sender, and punctuation marks that help the receiver in reading messages through sentences, have been combined with emojis. The phenomenon of conversational text on social media, emojis, becomes part of the sentence structure.

From various research perspectives on emojis, which have been explained at the beginning of this paper, this research focuses on emojis from a linguistic perspective. Research questions that can be asked are: how is the linguistic function of emojis (syntax, semantic and pragmatic) in conversations between internet users (social media). The object of this research focused on WhatsApp (WA) social media.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to DANESI (2017) emoji is a term in Japanese, which means picture and letter, which has the function of adding the effectiveness of conversation messages and emphasizing meaning in conversation. ASTEROFF (1987) provides a definition that emojis are relational icons. DANESI (2017) defines emojis as a character that can be searched on a computer that is used when communicating through a computer. Another definition of emojis was put forward by DANET,

RUEDENBERG-WRIGHT & ROSENBAUM-TAMARI (1997) that emojis are an iconic form used to express emotions. Another opinion expressed by REZABEK & COCHENOUR (1998) which states that emojis are visual cues formed from typographic symbols that represent feelings or emotions. Emojis are created as compensation for the inability to deliver voice tones, facial expressions, or gestures or gestures in written communication.

Charles William MORRIS (1938) introduced the semiotic model known as the three interrelated triadic relations of semiosis, namely syntax, semantics and pragmatics. These three triadic relations of semiosis are formed on three correlations which Morris considers to be a semiotic basis, consisting of a sign vehicle (S), designatum (D) and interpretant (I). Ali gave an explanation of the concept of Morris semiosis triadi relations (20098, namely that the sign vehicle is which act as a sign means that deliver something into a sign, designatum is which the sign refers to, the sign that refers to the object, and the interpretant is that effect on some interpreters in virtue of which the thing in question is a sign to that interpreter.

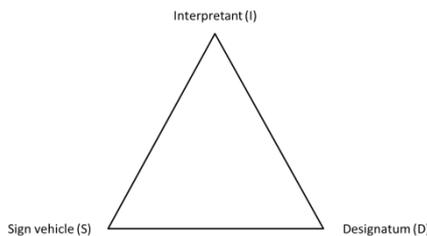


Figure 1: Morris' Triadic relation of semiosis

Three correlations produce syntactic dimensions, the study of the syntactical relations of signs to one another in abstraction from the relations of signs to objects or to interpreters, (MORRIS, 1938); the semantic dimension which studies the relation of signs to their designate and so to the objects which they may or do denote; and the pragmatic dimension which studies the relation of signs to their interpreters.

According to Morris, there are three dimensions of semiotics formed by triadic relationships, namely sign vehicle, designatum, and interpretant. To understand the sign and its communicative nature, one must analyze the sign by identifying its relationship with other signs, with what is shown or can be shown, and to its interpreters. Therefore, one can define the scope of each of the three dimensions of sign (semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic). As Morris stated:

Pragmatics is that portion of semiotics which deals with the origin, uses, and effects of signs within the behavior in which they occur; semantics deals with the signification of signs in all modes of signifying; syntactic deals with combinations of signs without regard for their specific significations of their relation to the behavior in which they occur (Morris, 1964: 10).

Referring to the above statement, Morris's semiotic concept (sign) which is divided into three dimensions of sign is that the semantic dimension is the study of the relationship of sign and object; the syntactic dimension is the study of the relationship between signs and other signs, and the pragmatic dimension is the study of the relationship of signs and interpreters (sign users). This semiotic

trichotomy provides a means to explore the meaning of signs, structures between signs, and responses induced by signs, thus contributing to a better understanding of signs as a means of communication.

According to FAN (2006), syntax is the study of the relationship of visual elements in one text with another text, whether the text is visual as a whole, or the entire contents of documents, computer screen displays, or control panels; semantics is the study of the relationship of visual representations with references, including objects, concepts, and ideas, and pragmatics are studies of the relationship between visual representations and conditions of production and their use, including audience characteristics, goals, and tasks. Each of the three dimensions of semiotics has its own or specific semiotic aspects of the study.

3. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to investigate the use of emojis from the *langue* (linguistic) and *parole* aspects. Researchers observed linguistic functions consisting of syntax, semantics, and pragmatics in emoji communication on WA visual media. This study used a semiotic analysis, using the Barthes' theory of *langue* and *parole*. The data source in this study was the results of a questionnaire distributed online on WA social media. Respondents answered twenty questions asked online (KURIANWAN, 2018).

There were 150 data collected. Characteristics of respondents were the number of respondents according to gender, with 64.2% of females and 35.8% of males. The number of respondents by age was 61% with ages between 19 and 20 years. Based on the type of work, more than 50% were students and employees. The most widely used social media in communication was WA reaching 94%. The behavior of respondents based on the effectiveness of social media used in delivering messages (SMS) was WA, with a percentage of 95.5%. The behavior of respondents based on images or icons that most widely and effectively used in communicating on WhatsApps was emoji, with a total of 91%. Furthermore, the most widely used form of emoji by respondents in communication was facial expressions, reaching 89%.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Emojis in WA are separate languages (langue) that already have social rules divided into categories, namely smileys and people (facial expressions), animals and nature, food and drink, activities, travel and places, objects, symbols, and flags. WA has provided emojis (langue) rules that will be used by internet users when they have a conversation in the WA text column. The parole level is about how individual internet users use emoji forms to express feelings, emotions, and thoughts. Based on the results of data analysis, the most frequently used emojis in Indonesia in both WA groups and individuals are smiley and people type emojis, 😊, with the percentage of 80,6%.

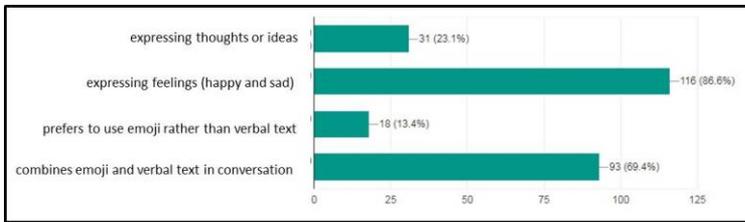


Figure 2: emoji form used by WA users

These data show that internet users can express their emotions and feelings individually by using emojis (smileys and people) which can provide an overview of moods and feelings for users in conversations in WA. This form of emoji communication also shows an open attitude (in public spaces) for users in expressing feelings and emotions.

The purpose of using smiley and people type emojis is to convey thoughts or ideas (23%), express feelings (86.6%), prefer to use emoji language rather than verbal language (13.4%), and prefer to combine verbal text and emoji language (69.4%). The data show that in making conversations in WA through groups or individuals, emojis are used more to convey feelings and emotions. The most widely used form of emoji is facial expressions.

One example is the conversation (figure 2) in the WA group of the French-Indonesian teaching association. The sender gave a birthday wish to the two members of the group, which ended with a face emoji as a relationship with the receiver. Sending birthday wishes using only verbal language cannot represent the sender's feelings, so

the sender uses the emoji visual language to show feelings of expression to his friend as the receiver.



Figure 3: Expressions of feelings and emotions using the language of
Emoji

Conversations between users in WA messages indicate that emojis are sentence elements. Thus, the sentence in a conversation consists of verbal and nonverbal language (emojis). Sentence sent via SMS shows that respondents use a combination of verbal language and emoji language. This can be seen in the arrangement of sentences, where emojis are placed at the beginning and end of sentences. Based on the data, as many as 76% of respondents use emojis at the end of the sentence. This means the emoji function is closing in sentences. Emoji functions as punctuation instead of period punctuation. The results of research on the position of emojis in sentences show that 76.9% emojis are placed at the end of a sentence and function as a

closing conversation, 14% are in the middle of a sentence and 9% are at the beginning of a sentence. One example of using emoji at the end of the sentence is in figure 4 below.



Figure 4: Emoji placement in sentences

Emojis that are elements of sentences can be illustrated in the example conversation above and in conducting their conversations that combine verbal text (sentences) and emojis. The sender in the conversation message in WA composes sentences with a combination of verbal text and emojis in conveying ideas and expressing feelings. Likewise, the receiver of the message answers the message with a combination of verbal text and emojis. Messages sent with a combination of verbal text and emojis are answered with verbal text and emojis.

Based on the results of research, the most popular type of emoji or widely used is smiley and people type emojis. Furthermore, among the many types of emoji smileys and people, the most widely used expressions of feelings and emotions are grinning faces, face blowing a kiss and loudly crying faces emojis.

Table 1: Choice of emoji types

Emojis	Semantics
	<p>Grinning Face: A yellow face with simple, open eyes and a broad, open smile, showing upper teeth and tongue on some platforms. Often conveys general pleasure and good cheer or humor. (https://emojipedia.org/grinning-face/)</p>
	<p>Face Blowing a Kiss: A yellow face winking with puckered lips blowing a kiss, depicted as a small, red heart. May represent a kiss goodbye or good night and convey feelings of love and affection more generally. https://emojipedia.org/face-throwing-a-kiss/)</p>
	<p>Loudly Crying Face: A yellow face with an open mouth wailing and streams of heavy tears flowing from closed eyes. May convey inconsolable grief but also other intense feelings, such as uncontrollable laughter or overwhelming joy. (https://emojipedia.org/loudly-crying-face/)</p>

The character of the conversation performer can be known through the smileys and people type emojis used. Emoji's communication used describes his identity. The grinning face emoji facial expression shows the meaning of fun and excitement, so WA users can use the emoji to express feelings.



Figure 5: use of emojis in sentences

Emoji pragmatics shows the interaction of conversations (speech acts) between the sender (speaker) and receiver (interlocutor). The pragmatic function of emojis shows the emotional connection involved in the conversation in WA. Emojis function as a medium for delivering messages personally and in general and shows communication between personas, a relaxed or official atmosphere, social relations, and hierarchical relationships between personas, for example communication between directors and employees, teachers and students, and parents and children

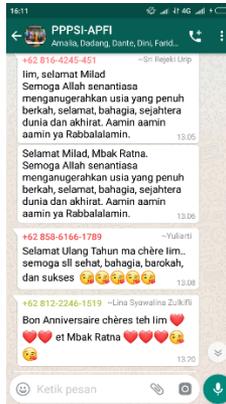


Figure 6: The emoji pragmatics in sentences

One example is the conversation in the WA group of French teaching associations throughout Indonesia in figure 6. One member of the association is having a birthday, and another WA member congratulates. The pragmatic functions of the emojis in the conversation show the relationship of fellow members and the relationship of intimacy through the use of emojis. The birthday greeting ends with an emoji that has a pragmatic function of the close and emotional relationships between members of the association.

5. CONCLUSION

Emoji is a language system in social media that has linguistic functions (syntactic, semantic and pragmatic). The syntax function is an emoji being a part or sentence forming element, which can have a position at the beginning of a sentence, in the middle, and the end of a

sentence. However, the most dominant syntactic function is as a closing sentence. The semantic function is that emojis express connotation meanings in conversation. Expressions of users' feelings and emotions are not enough just to be conveyed using verbal language but by using the visual language of emojis. The function of emoji pragmatics is to show how the relationship between persona (users) in communication. The function of emoji pragmatics also shows that there is an equal relationship in a WA group wherein the position between members there are members who have higher or lower positions. Emoji pragmatics represents communication between fellow members in WA communication that does not show differences in social status or social hierarchy. The pragmatic functions of emojis strengthen the meaning and social relations between users in communication.

In semiotic terms, emojis are vehicle signs that can convey the meaning of signs in the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic dimensions. Emojis in the syntactic dimension are visual signs that have a relationship with verbal signs in conversation text (sentences) so as to produce meaning. Emoji in semantics is the sign relationship with an object as a sign that is referred to. For example, happy face expression emojis refer to the intent of the message conveyed by the sender. Emojis in pragmatic are emojis signs interpreted by interpreters as receivers of messages based on the context of the conversation.

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