

Syntactic and Pragmatic Function of Text Messages Sent by Denpasar Deaf People in WhatsApp Conversation: Study Case

Satyawati

Linguistics Magister Program, Universitas Udayana

ABSTRACT : Instant messenger application is a popular way of communication in the present day. WhatsApp is one of them. The user of WhatsApp varied, and the Deaf community is no exception. The language used in an online instant messenger, such as WhatsApp, categorized as oralized written text. Meaning, the language resembles both written and oral language. The “spoken” language for the Deaf community is Sign language, the language used in WhatsApp presumably would have a reflection of Sign language structure. The present article is a study case with one Deaf participant. From the analysis conducted, it was found that the participant tends to use two verbs in a row, use a verb to function as an adverb, and the ellipsis of syntactic function and syntax categories such as subject and conjunction occurred. Furthermore, the participant tends to convey directly to the point of what he wants to say in the conversation. The result suggested that the Sign language structure influences the language used in WhatsApp conversation. Other than the Sign language structure that might have influenced the most, the situation of language acquisition of Deaf children could not be denied. Besides that, WhatsApp's characteristic as an instant messenger application might also have some influence.

Keywords: *Sign language, Denpasar Sign Language, WhatsApp, Instant messaging*

I. INTRODUCTION

The language used in an instant messaging application, such as WhatsApp, by many researchers said to be resembling both written and oral language (Baym, 2006: 525). Yus (2011) called the phenomenon as oralized written text. In other words, spoken language characteristics would appear in an instant messaging application interaction. With those assumptions, when Deaf people using WhatsApp the language would resemble the spoken language characteristics that they used that is Sign language (SL).

Spoken and Sign language (SL) has a different modality. Spoken language is an aural-oral modality, whereas SL is a visual-kinetic modality (Hill, 2017: 147). Contrary to popular beliefs, SL is not dependent on the dominant spoken language that lives around them. Instead, SL is an independent language that has its system and structure (Lane, 2011: 4). The basic word order of BI is Subject (S)–Verb (V)–Object (O), whereas for SL, in general, the word order is S-O-V. Many Deaf people have difficulties to understand and learn the dominant spoken language that lives around the community (Cannon & Kirby, 2013; Sandler, 2006). Besides, SL has not the equivalent of written form, as many spoken languages had as of that makes it more difficult.

Instant messaging application is a popular way of communication in the present days. WhatsApp is one of such application. The user of WhatsApp is varied and the Deaf communities are no exception. WhatsApp is a real-time instant messenger which the user could get immediate reply or as if the user get in real life conversation. WhatsApp based their communication on text, although the application allows users to send or received photos, videos, and audios. With the situation I have mentioned in paragraph before, it is interesting to see how Deaf individuals' use of language in WhatsApp in text form.

In this writing, the spoken language will refer to Bahasa Indonesia (BI); the official spoken language in Indonesia and Sign Language (SL) will refer to Denpasar Sign Language (DSL). The present article aims to discuss the structure of the text messages sent in WhatsApp conversation by Deaf individual.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Speakers convey a sentence to communicate with each other (Mey, 2006: 51–52). The order of syntactic function in a sentence could determine the meaning of the speaker's intent. However, several other aspects could also determine the meaning behind sentences, such as context and speech acts, in general, classified as pragmatic aspects.

A syntactic function is a lexeme relationship that already has a category with other lexemes to form interrelated relationships (Kridalaksana, 1999: 128). Alwi (2003: 320) stated syntactic functions are a

combination of certain categories and certain semantic roles which ultimately form functions. These functions have external and internal uses. External uses are related to the aspects outside the language, whereas internal uses are related to the sound production of the language. Kridalaksana (1999) divided syntactic functions into five categories: subject, predicate, object, complement, and adverbial function.

Pragmatic often being used to reveal the “real” meaning. Yule (2014: 126) stated that pragmatic is the study of “speaker meaning” how the listener/reader could understand the meaning behind the sentences that the speaker conveys. The foundation for the present article is from the speech act theories by Searle (1969). The speech act contained five categories: representatives, directives, commissives, expressive, and declarative (inside Huang, 2006: 661).

III. METHOD

The present study involved one participant that is Participant A. Participant A identified himself as Deaf. The term Deaf (with capital “D”), refers to a minority language community who uses SL as a medium of communication. Other than that, Deaf also considered a cultural identity that has its historic journey (Deumert, 2009: 413, Ladd, 2006: 299).

Participant A born in a hearing family and the only deaf person in the nuclear family. Participant A, like many other Deaf people in Indonesia, have been exposed to the spoken language since childhood. The education system in Indonesia for the Deaf uses an oral approach. Thus, it can be said that Participant A has become accustomed to spoken languages, in this case, BI. Participant A has a bachelor’s degree from a well-known university in Bali with all the teaching done by an oral approach since he was the only deaf student there.

Participant A actively participates in various activities such as seminars, workshops, and discussions. Some of his achievements are the top five Mister Deaf International and Mister Deaf Asia in 2012. In 2015 and 2016, he was one of the delegates to be the representative from Indonesia in the United Nations discussion about deaf politics worldwide. From 2016 to 2017 and 2019, he participated in a workshop held by Laboratorium Riset Bahasa Isyarat (Sign Language Research Laboratory) or abbreviated as LRBI in Universitas Indonesia. The workshop was a training teaching method for the deaf, dictionary-making for Sign language dictionary, and Sign language linguistics for research purposes.

With Participant A’s background, it is interesting to see the use of language in WhatsApp conversation. Other than that, the frequency of chatting in WhatsApp between Participant A and the researcher is often. Therefore, the data obtained is varied.

The data sourced from text conversation in WhatsApp (personal chatting) between the researcher (as Hearing people) and Participant A (as Deaf people). All the data went naturally without set-up. The purpose is to gather the everyday language that participants use in WhatsApp’s conversation. Other than that, I preferred to make the situation as comfortable as possible because I assumed the suppression from the dominant community around the Deaf community, make Deaf people more sensitive. There are four conversations used for the present analysis that is conversations from March 26, April 17, May 18, and July 31.

The conversation would be screen-captured to display. Then, the data would be rewritten and coded based on the order of the conversation (a1, a2, a3, so on) and the date the conversation occurred (26/3). The letter “A” is for Participant A and “T” for the researcher. The example as shown below.



Figure 1 Captured Conversation

DATA A26/3

- A a1 Pagi
a2 Hari Rabu pagi ada waktu gak ?
- T a3 halo, pagi kak
a4 aku harusnya sih Rabu pagi ada kelas, tapi 1 kelas aja
a5 kenapa kak?
- A a6 Oh ok. Baik, Kak butuh relawan JBI diundang panitia acara.
a7 Sebentar, kak bertanya sama panitia untuk sediakan bawa JBI sendiri

Figure 2 Coded Rewritten Data

After the conversation coded, utterances would then be selected to be analyzed further. The selection is based on unusual or uncommon structures used by participants. The translation would be inserted below the utterances. The example of the data shown below. For supporting evidence, informal interviews, and observations of the time spent together with participants will be included in the discussion.

- a6 Oh ok. Baik, KakbutuhrelawanJBI(karena) diundangpanitia acara
a6 oh ok. Right, I need volunteered SLI invinted committee event
S V O (conj.) Comp.¹

‘Oh, ok. Saya butuhpenerjemahbahasaIsyaratkarenadiundangkesuatu acara oleh panitia’
‘Oh, alright. I needed SLI because invited to an event by the committee’

IV. RESULT



Figure 3 Data A26/3

DATA A26/3

- A – a1 Pagi Satya
a2 Hari Rabu pagi adawaktugak ?
T – a3 halo, pagikak
a4 akuharusnyasih Rabu pagi adakelas, tapi 1 kelasaja
a5 kenapakak?
A – a6 Oh ok. Baik, Kakbutuhrelawan JBI diundangpanitia acara.

¹List of abbreviation given in the last pages of article

a7 Sebentar, kakbertanyasamapanitiauntuksedikanbawa JBI sendiri
 T – a8 yaaah, padahalmauikut
 a9 tapikayaknyaadakelas..
 a10 *berharaptidakadkelas- hahahahahah
 A – a11 KakKecewakarenapanitiatidak sedia
 a12 Kaktidakhadiraja

Data A26/3 took place at March of 26, 2018 when Participant A ask for help from T to attend an event as Sign Language Interpreter (SLI). In a2, Participant A asked whether T have time in Wednesday morning. The a2 is the “opening” or an introductory before conveying the “real” intention with a question form. Then, Participant A conveyed the “real” intention in a6, as shown below.

a6 Oh ok. Baik, KakbutuhrelawanJBI (karena)diundangpanitiaacara
 a6 oh ok. Right, I need volunteered SLI invited committee event
 S V O (conj.) Comp.

‘Oh, Baik. Saya butuhpenerjemahbahasaIsyaratkarenadiundangkesuatu acara oleh panitia’
 ‘Oh, alright. I needed SLI because invited to an event by the committee’

The a6 is a directives speech act. Participant A uses the verb *butuh*(need) which could be interpreted as a request to T. Syntactic function on the a6 utterance is complete (S-V-O-Comp.). However, the conjunction *karena*(because)does not appear in the utterance. The appearance of the conjunction is crucial because the a6 reveal the cause of Participant As’ needed an interpreter. The absence of the conjunction “*karena*” in the a6 utterance might associate with the character of SL itself. SL tend to have a simultaneous structure rather than sequential structure as spoke language did (Brentari, 2006: 342). Meaning, speaker would not be focusing on the order of the word, instead focusing on the point or the intention the speaker want to convey.

Next, the nominal phrase *panitia acara* (committee’s event) is an indefinite phrase. Before the a6 utterance, there are no reference that refer to *panitia acara*. The situation shows that Participant A already had assumed that the interlocutor has the same knowledge as him. As similar as the above paragraph, the indefinite noun phrase “*panitia acara*” also show signal of SL’s character. SL tend to have a different word order depend on the discourse factors (Lilo-Martin, 2006: 351).

a7 Sebentar, kakbertanyasamapanitiauntuksedikanbawa JBI sendiri
 Wait, I ask to the committee to provided bring SLI by myself
 S V Comp. Prep. V V O Pron.

‘Sebentar, kakakbertanyakepadapanitiauntukmenyediakan JBI sendiri’
 ‘Wait, I will ask the committee to provide the SLI myself’

The a7 utterance is a response to the fact that T could not fulfilled Participant A’s request. Participant A intend to ask the committee to provide the SLI. However, the structure of the prepositional phrase *untuksedikanbawa JBI sendiri*(provide the SLI myself) showing the contrary intend in the beginning. It is because Participant A uses two verbs that are *sedikan*(provide) dan *bawa*(bring). In common grammar structure, the position after the verb usually filled directly with the object. Therefore, the verb that needs to be eliminated is the verb *bawa*. In addition, the reflexive pronoun *sendiri*(by myself) seems to be not functioned as it should be. It appears the pronoun did not refer to the subject of the sentence, which is *Kakak*(I), but instead it refers to the object which is *panitia*(the committee).

Then, Participant A express his disappointment at the unavailability of the interpreter at the event. The disappointment conveyed in a11, as shown below.

a11 Kak Kecewa karena panitiatidak sedia
 I dissapoint because the committee not provide
 S V Conj. S V

‘Saya kecewakarenapanitiatidakmenyediakan (jasapenerjemah)’
 ‘I am disappointed because the committee does not provide (SLI)’

The a11 utterance consists of two clauses divided by the causal conjunction *karena* (because). Ellipsis is occurred in the object of the second clause. The object of the second clause could be filled with the noun *penerjemah*(interpreter). As mentioned before, the behavior of spoken language reflects in the use of online language, one of them is ellipsis. Participant A would expect the interlocutor, Participant T, to understand the message. It is indeed, if the message left implicit information, the interlocutor role would be greater to make the message understandable (Yus, 2011: 179). However, I assumed the absence of the object in the second clause also followed by the fact of the SL’s character; SL tend to dependent on discourse factor to form some information (Lilo-Martin, 2006).



Figure 4 Data A17/4

DATA A17/4

T – b1 pagiKak A

b2 apaakubolehmintapenelitianbahasaisyaratygudhpernahdilakuin? hehehhee

A – b3 Pagi juga

b4 Kaklgi workshop

b5 kalauadakamusbahasaIsyarat Yogyakarta dan Jakarta

b6 Denpasar-Bali belumadadapiadakamusSakuBisindo Daerah Denpasar masihdiproses

T – b7 ohhhgitu..

b8 jadi, belumadapenelitianbahasaisyarat Denpasar ya?

A – b9 Sudahhanya di Denpasar

b10 Kamussakunamanya

b11 bukankamuslengkap

The DATA A17/4 taken place at April of 17, 2018. In the b2, T asked Participant A about DSL research that had been published. Then, Participant A gave responses in two different utterances that are b5 and b6. The utterances shown below.

b5 kalauadakamus bahasaIsyaratYogyakarta dan Jakarta
if available dictionary Sign Language Yogyakarta and Jakarta
conj. V S

‘kalauKamus Bahasa Isyarat Yogyakarta dan Jakarta ada’

‘Jakarta and Yogyakarta Sign Language Dictionary is available’

In b5 and b6, Participant A presents something as he believes; “the truth of the expressed proposition” (Huang, 2006: 660). That is included in the representative speech act.

The verb *ada* (available) is in the initial position followed by the subject “*KamusbahasaIsyarat Yogyakarta dan Jakarta*” (Jakarta and Yogyakarta Sign Language Dictionary). In BI structure, this word order is possible. However, the V-S order usually have the indefinite subject, whereas in b5 the subject is definite.

The *kalau*(if)conjunction that precedes the verb is an ambiguous form. Usually, the *if* conjunction used to reveal a condition. However, in BI the *if* conjunction also can be used to reveal two opposite situations. For example, “*kalauthe ada, kopi tidakada*” (there’s tea, but no coffee). The *if* conjunction in b5 utterance were used for this condition.

Yus (2011: 161) categorized one of the characteristics of interaction in the chat room is clipped messages, that usually “Message turns up on the screen divided into chunks ...”. The b5 utterances is not a complete message. There is a following utterance that must be included, that is the b6.

b6 (Kamus) Denpasar-Bali belumada tapiada kamussakuBisindo
(Dictionary) Denpasar-Bali not yet available but available dictionary pocket SL
S V V S

daerah Denpasar masih diproses
 area of Denpasar still in the process
 Adv.M

“Kamus Denpasar-Bali belum ada, tapi ada kamus saku Bisindo Denpasar-Bali masih diproses”
 “The Denpasar-Bali dictionary is not available yet, but there’s a pocket dictionary of Bisindo
 Denpasar-Bali still in the process”

The b6 conveys an information about Denpasar Sign language (DSL) dictionary. The first clause conveys information that the “big” DSL dictionary is not available yet. Then, the second clause conveys information that there is a pocket dictionary of DSL that already in the process of making. In the second clause, the pairing of the verb *ada* (available) and the adverb of manner *masih diproses* (still in the process) is contradictory. The use of the verb *ada* is to say that the dictionary is available, while the adverb *masih diproses* illustrates the opposite: the dictionary is not available yet because it still in the process. To my interpretation, the verb *ada* is not refers to the dictionary, instead it refers to the adverb (*masih diproses*). I could say, Participant A uses *adato* function as an adverb.

As explained before, there are clipped message in the conversation in instant messenger. Therefore, I assume that the b5 utterance is not a complete sentence; it must be merged to the b6 utterance.

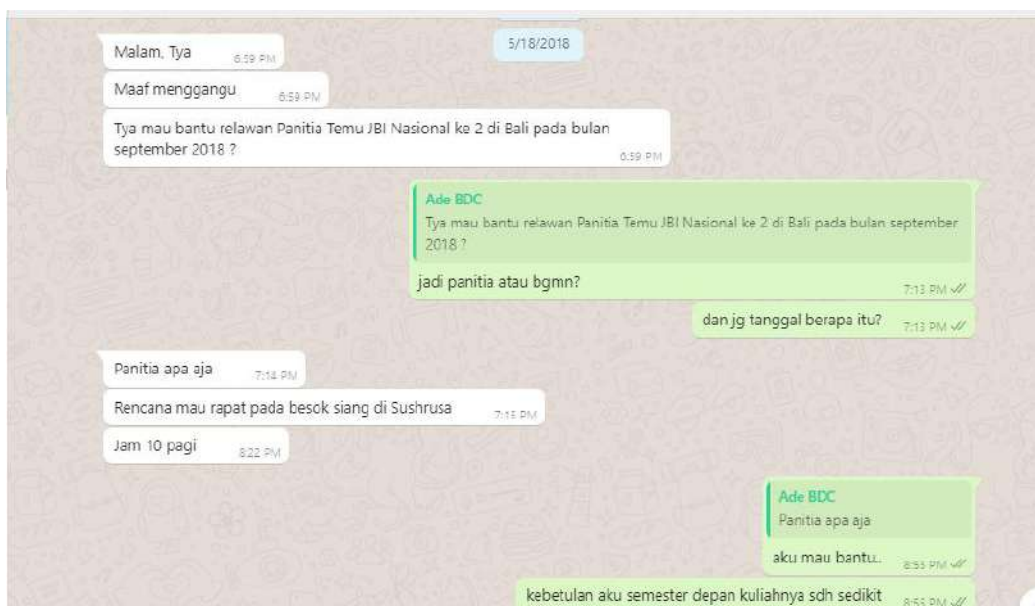


Figure 5 DATA 18/5

DATA A18/5

A – c1 Malam, T

c2 Maaf mengganggu

c3 T mau bantu relawan Panitia Temu JBI Nasional ke 2 di Bali pada bulan September 2018?

T – c4 jadi panitia atau bgmn?

c5 dan jg tanggal berapa itu?

A – c6 panitia apa aja

c7 Rencana mau rapat pada besok siang di Sushrusa

c8 jam 10 pagi

T – c9 aku mau bantu..

c10 kebetulan aku semester depan kuliahnya sdh sedikit

The DATA 18/5 taken place at May of 18, 2018. Participant A asked T to join the committee of the future event in September 2018. The c1 – c3 utterances is the opening of the conversation, conveying the intention as mentioned before. The c4 and c5 are the responses from T asking about the specific detail of the committee and when was event would be held. Participant A answer with only one utterance in one sentence, that is in the c6.

c6 panitia apa aja
 committee any

‘terserah mau jadi panitia apa’
 ‘any position, as you wish’

DATA A31/7



Figure 6 Data A 31/7

- A – d1 Malam T
d2 maafmengganggu
d3 Besokkuliahgak?
- T – d4 Halo kak
d5 hariiniadakekampusutk bantu dosenasih..
d6 adaapakak?
- A – d7 Wah, ga bisa yah?
d8 Mau butuh JBI di dinassosial jam 9.30 pagi
- T – d9 yah... aduhgabisakak.
d10 mungkinbisanyabarusianggitu
- A – d11 Ok, Thanks
d12 waktuadajanjisoalnya

In this conversation, Participant A asked for help from T to be an interpreter for some event. The intention uttered in d8 as below.

d8 Mau butuh JBI di dinassosial jam 9:30 pagi
wanted needed SLI at social welfare office 9:30 in the morning
V O Adv.P Adv.T

'Saya butuh penerjemah untuk jam 9:30 pagi di Dinas Sosial'
'I need interpreter at Social Welfare office, 9:30 in the morning'

Based on Searle's speech act typology, the d8 utterance is directives because Participant A requests something from T that is asking T to do interpreting duty in an event. Next, one of the characteristics of the language used in online chatting applications is deletion. The deletion includes subject pronouns, vowels, and punctuation (Baym, 2006: 525). It is aligned with the situation in the d8 utterance in which the subject *I* have not appeared.

The order of the verb phrase of the d8 utterance contains adverb *mau* (wanted) and verb *butuh* (needed). In BI, the modifier of a verb phrase is an adverb. However, the adverb *mau* is an adverb that modifies a performative verb, such as running, walking, sleeping, etc. As Kridalaksana (1999: 97) stated that the adverb *mau* categorized as modality adverbs: to explain the speaker's attitude or nuances that are related to, one of which, said performative act. On the other hand, *butuh* is not a performative verb, instead it is a conditional verb. Hence, I could say that the pairing *maubutuh* (wanted needing) is uncommon.

Nevertheless, the inference process is succeeded as T proceeds to reply to the d8 utterance in d9 utterance. Then, because T cannot do it at 9:30 in the morning, T offers to do it in the afternoon. However, time cannot be changed because it is already settled. It is shown at the d12 utterance below.

d12 waktuada janji soalnya
 time there's promise because
 N V N conj.

'lantaransudahjanji jam sebelbelumnya'

'I have already settled the time'

The d12 utterance consists of a noun *waktu* (time), a verb *ada* (there's), and a noun *janji* (promise). The noun *waktu* is an indefinite concept of existence that usually includes a process. However, based on the context in d12 utterance, *waktu* shows a similar function as *jam* (hour/clock) that is a definite period equal to 24 hours a day or 60 minutes per hour.

Similar to the above situation, the use of the verb *ada* (available) functioned as an adverb *sudah* (yet/already). The adverb *sudah* modifies the noun *janji*, showing that Participant A already settled the timing beforehand. The situation aligned with several studies indicated that Deaf students overuse a lexical item such as nouns and verbs to function as a preposition, conjunction, etc. and tend to underuse adjectives and adverbs (Cannon and Kirby, 2013: 294).

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis, several conclusions can be taken. First, Participant A tends to use two verbs in a row in his utterances. Second, Participant A uses a verb to function as an adverb. Lastly, the ellipsis of syntactic functions, such as subject and conjunction, occurred.

From the conclusion, several factors can be said as an influence of these results. The modality of Sign language (a visual-kinetic language) impact the system and the structure of Sign language. From *Bahasa Isyarat Jakarta: Buku Pedoman Siswa Tingkat 1* (Jakarta Sign Language: Guide for Beginner), it is said that Jakarta Sign language's basic word order is S-O-V.

BI is an agglutinative language meaning the affixes process found often. On the other hand, Sign languages very rarely have affixes process. Sign languages tend to embed signs to form complex sentences. Sign languages are most likely dependent on discourse factors; the word order changes fluidly. In the interaction of Sign language users, face-to-face interaction is important. When the user has the chance to interact, they tend to get right to the point. These characteristics may reflect in online writing; Deaf individuals get straight to the point.

Other than Sign language characteristics that may have an impact on the usage of online writing applications, the Deaf children's language acquisition situation needs to consider. Around 95% of Deaf children are born with hearing parents, meaning that children have not to access to natural languages because parents did not use Sign language. Therefore, it could impact the acquiring process of the first language that later would also have an impact on second language acquisition. As mentioned before, BI and Sign language is two different languages with its system and structure. BI plays a role as a second language to Deaf people, but many have difficulties to master BI. The situation has already been brought up by several researchers. Spoken languages based the words on sound where Deaf people did not have access to.

The characteristics of the instant messenger application itself may affect the behavior of Deaf individual's use of language. WhatsApp is a text-based communication messenger, meaning the non-verbal aspects would not show in WhatsApp conversation. Meanwhile, visual aspects for Deaf individuals are important. Therefore, there might be some information that is not fully conveyed in WhatsApp's conversation. As a result, Deaf individuals use unusual word choices and the structure of sentences.

The present article is preliminary research that needs in-depth research in the future. Technology may be the key to build a better interaction between Deaf communities and others. Hence, the research in this field is needed to understand how Deaf individuals use language in an online communication application.

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***LIST OF ABBREVIATION**

- S – Subject
V – Verb
O – Object
Comp. – Complement
Adv.F – Adverbs of Frequency
Adv.T – Adverbs of Time
Adv.P – Adverbs of Place
Adv.M – Adverbs of Manner
N- Noun
Pron. – Pronoun
Conj. - Conjunction