



IMPLICATURE IN THE INTERNET MEMES: SEMIO-PRAGMATICS ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Internet memes refer to memes that are spread through the Internet, from person to person via social networks, blogs, direct email, or news sources. The main purpose of internet memes are for humorous or to entertain the readers. However, not all people can easily interpret a meme. This phenomenon appears to be the case because several internet memes contain implied meaning or implicature due to the limited caption available and the picture it brings which has its own character and representation. The purpose of this research is to describe the implicature in the internet memes by using Grice's theory in the perspective semiotics and pragmatics due to all of contexts, symbol, icon, and index in the memes influence the interpretation of the implied meaning and the intention. In this analysis, the writers uses qualitative method. The data were taken from the three meme websites: 9gag.com, knowyourmeme.com and memecenter.com. The data collected have been completely analyzed based on the research questions. The results show the most dominant memes spread of using conventional implicature. There are six categories found based on its idea and representation; they are (1) masculinity, (2) personal experience, (3) loneliness, (4) social events, (5) false analogy and (6) sarcasm. Then, there are at least two contexts that influence the implication of each meme, and the most dominant influence is the social contexts.

Keywords: *implicature, context, internet meme, function*

1 Introduction

In daily life, people always communicate to interact with one another. It is the basic of being a human considering human is a social being that needs society to survive so it is safe to say that no one can live and survive alone in this world. Communication can be divided into two, the first one is verbal communication and the second one is non-verbal communication. Due to the importance of communication, there have been many findings that researchers and philosophers had found until today. And there are many ways to convey what is in someone's mind, one of them is through implicature.

It is clear that implicature plays a major role in language change, triggering both syntactic and semantic changes. This happens because people do not always say things directly but tend to imply them. According to Grice (1975), "implicature is a technical term in the pragmatics subfield of linguistics, which refers to what is suggested in an utterance, even though neither expressed nor strictly implied (entailed) by the utterance." Based on these definitions, implicature can be defined as unstated meaning by speaker which represents true intention of speaker. Implicature or the implicit meaning of a statement, sentence or utterance can be seen by analyzing it.

Context is needed in order to get the implication to work, meaning it requires various factors. for instance, a presupposition between the speaker and the hearer. Presupposition, according to Levinson (1983), concerns with the way in which propositions already presumed in a discourse context are usually not stated or questioned, but encoded in a more 'background' way. What time the

conversation or the statement occurs, whether it is at night, midnight, or noon, where the conversation takes place and which cultural environments influence the utterance. In other words, presupposition is to assume something.

Specifically, there are two types of implicature. The first one is conversational implicature and the other one is conventional implicature. In conversational implicature, there is a term called as Grice's cooperative principle. Basically, cooperative principle describes how an effective communication can be achieved in a common daily conversation. Grice then formulated cooperative principles into four conversational maxims. They consist of maxim of relevance, maxim of quality, maxim of quantity and maxim of manner. Each of those maxims serves a specific principle in order to explain how a conversation can be successfully achieved between the speaker and the hearer. Conventional Implicature, on the other hand, is independent of the cooperative principle and its four maxims.

Breaking the rule of cooperative principle or Gricean maxims consist of "flouted" (with the listener being expected to be able to understand the message) maxims and "violated" (with the listener is expected not to know the message obviously) maxims. Relatively, the violation of cooperative principle can be applied to analyze the implicature of all kind conversations, starting from daily verbal conversation, movies and TV show dialogue, to a textual conversation in the Internet such as text that contained in a picture which termed as Internet Meme. These so called Meme was spreading on the Internet like wild fire. Meme was originally brought up since the vastly increased usage of Internet. Quoted from Karen Schubert's (2003) definition in her article "Bazar Goes Bizarre", "an Internet Meme is an activity, concept, catchphrase or piece of media which spreads, often as mimicry from person to person via the internet". A meme can often be extremely hilarious if there were presupposition or common sense between the writers and the reader, but at the same time it can also be sarcastic and often satirical. The humor contained in internet meme exists not only because of the presupposition between author of the meme and the viewer, but it also caused by the implicature contained within the message of the meme.

Previous studies show that most of internet memes used in an inappropriate contexts both of English and Indonesian internet communities. Furthermore, the internet memes allow users to produce meanings according to the theme of a picture. The creator on internet memes write/generate meanings while not following the formulas/themes, just to have fun with it. Internet memes require users to be creative in producing meanings in respect to symbols, words, and contexts. It is the same with the advertisements in the form of images works; an image + word[s] = meanings. Internet memes are examples of how images, texts, art, language, creativity, myths, and popular culture relate to each other, which then is open for multi-interpretation regarding its user. These memes contain jokes, as well as reflecting universal emotions, such as anger, sadness, social and cultural message. (Kariko, 2016; Putra & Triyono, 2018).

Furthermore, there are two types of internet meme widely known among internet users. They are image meme and short video meme. But, the most popular one is image meme due to ease of access and wide availability. Hence people or analysts in this case, have a special interest and intrigued to analyze the Implicature contained in Image Memes along with the context that influences the implication.

Overall, meme provides a strong new way to combine creativity, art, message, and humor in the internet culture. A meme can be generated by the internet users themselves. They are free to choose which image which suits their idea and what caption do they want to add to express their ideas. Then, a well known website, pcmag.com, describes the term Internet meme itself can be existed in the form of an image, video, story or joke that is voluntarily passed from one Internet user to another via e-mail, blogs and social networking sites. Meme is considered as a form of art, Internet memes are created to promote individuals, groups, movies, art, music and products, as well as to perpetrate a hoax or just to be funny. They can disappear in days or last for years. An example of implicature as seen on meme is shown in the example (1).

(1) Grumpy Cat Meme



This meme shows judging by the enormous productions of the meme as seen in 9gag.com and other internet meme sources, this genre of meme is one of the most used meme in the world. This meme is known as "grumpy cat meme" and usually has variants of captions which are made by the meme's website users. This meme, in particular, has a caption which says "life is like a box of chocolates. I don't like chocolate." The implied meaning of the caption is that the meme creator does not like the life he is living.

The person creating this meme intends to use the picture of an angry cat as the emphasis of his statement. An Implicature or implied meaning tends to be influenced by certain context(s). In order to understand the meme, one has to possess mutual background knowledge with the meme creator. It is regarded that social context, which refers to the social circumstances, is in play in the influence of the implicature of the meme. It is common knowledge among any people and society that chocolate symbolizes delicacy, sweetness, love, pleasure and good, and positive things. It is also most people's favorite food.

On the other hand, this meme is also influenced by the physical context. The picture on the meme is showing a cat having an unhappy expression or anger. This expression affects what is stated by the creator of the meme and emphasizes the statement, which in this case, discontentment. This the difference of this study from the previous ones. In this study, the writers focused on their analysis on the implicature based from Grice' theory of Implicature (1975) and the representation of the idea and ideology in the meme because implicature is one of many means of communication. It is also very dependent upon the context that is in play. On the other hand, internet meme is a kind of social media phenomenon that has begun since the vast usage of internet and has been lasted for years until this day. It is also a new way to communicate or to deliver ideology or thoughts to people through a very unique way using picture and a few words or caption.

2 Methodology

In this study, the writers use qualitative method to collect and analyze the data. Qualitative method is applied in order to obtain more in-depth, comprehensive information from the data.

Creswell (2009) defined that the qualitative approach as one in which the inquirer often makes knowledge claims based primarily on constructivist perspectives (i.e., the multiple meanings of individual experiences, meanings socially and historically constructed with an intent of developing a theory or pattern) or advocacy/participatory perspectives (i.e., political, issue-oriented, collaborative, or change oriented) or both. It also uses strategies of inquiry such as narratives, phenomenologies, ethnographies, grounded theory studies, or case studies. The writers collect open-ended, emerging data with the primary intent of developing themes from the data.

In this research, the data were taken from the internet. The data were collected generally by searching through the internet or World-Wide-Web on various meme websites. There are three main websites used to collect most of the data, namely www.memecenter.com, www.knowyourmeme.com, and 9gag.com. Most of the data were taken from 9gag.com, 2016. Websites such as 9gag.com and knowyourmeme.com are two well known websites on the internet that use image meme as its main content.

The writers focus on the documentation method (Moleong, 2006) to collect the data. The writers collected the data by surfing the image memes from the websites that are related with the topic, observing the image memes, read the caption, analyze them between the image and the caption, finding of the implicature from each of the memes, and last but not least, download the 20 data (memes).

Then, the collected data have been analyzed by using related theories to the implicature or implied meaning, the functions, and the representation of the idea behind the pictures by using

pragmatics principles (Strauss & Feiz, 2014); and semiotic principles in which all of the symbols, index, and icon in the internet memes involved. (Hoed, 2011).

3 Results and Findings

The writers found that there are vast varieties of internet memes. There are a lot of genres of image memes which are differentiated by the picture of the meme itself. From all 20 memes that have been analyzed, the writers found many memes that contain implicature that refers to the conventional implicature. The hidden messages are dominantly satirical and sarcastic concerning certain genre or specific social conditions. They aim to critic, to ridicule and to satirize a phenomenon that is happening in the world or society. With that described purpose, a meme is usually packed with humor to entertain readers, but jokes actually implies criticism. Furthermore, the analyzed data show that they consist of different and various categories. The implicature found within memes are separated into some points consisting; (1) masculinity, (2) personal pxperience, (3) loneliness, (4) social events, (5) false analogy and (6) sarcasm. All of the findings will be described in brief as follow.

(1) Masculinity



Conventional implicature is contained in the example (1). Using physical context and linguistic context, the implicit meaning can be derived from the given caption. Based on the Linguistics context, the caption saying "Men have feelings too!," The meme writer specifically mentions the genre of men, which intended to be used as a comparison to the opposite genre. It implies that men are similar with women, that they have feelings too resembling the feelings of their opposite genre. However, the bottom caption saying "FOR EXAMPLE, WE FEEL HUNGRY" implies the masculinity of men, that men have no other feelings except physical feeling of hunger. The meme makes an implied statement that men are a very tough human beings and are more superior than women because they bear no emotional feelings like sad, happy, and other feelings except hungry. Furthermore, this is influenced by the physical context, semiotically the image consisting a muscular man with a moustache and posing a fighting stance. The expression of the man's face also represents toughness which symbolizes toughness of a man which in result emphasizing the stated implication.

(2) Personal Experience

This section will describe kinds of memes that representing personal experience that happened in certain phase of people's personal life. Consider the example (2).



In example (2), it is called as *Scumbag Brain Meme*. Literally, the conventional implicature of this meme brings up to a fact, that at times, “our brain do not want cooperate to our will”. The creator of the meme tries to make a joke by telling his own bizarre experience in the caption and the acknowledgement that other people around the world must also have experienced it the same way he did. The picture in "Scumbag Brain" genre represents and also supports the meme creator’s true intention because it acts as an emphasizing agent of the statement and as a mediator between the statement and the reader. In the data the writers are applying linguistics, social context and lastly the epistemic context to analyze the meme.

(3) Loneliness



This example (3) comes with the name *Forever Alone Meme*. the implied meaning of this meme is that for 2 minutes, as mentioned in the meme caption, he is going to have friends because he will be approached by his classmates only when he has a pack of gum and afterwards they will leave him alone again as the gum finished. Based on physical context, the picture represents loneliness and disappointment in life with the character posing an abnormally swollen face and its representation of loneliness has been very well known by the internet users over the years. The contexts that involved are physical context, epistemic and social contexts.

(4) Social Events



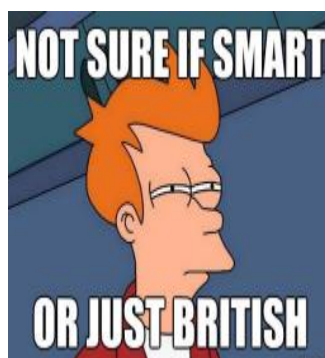
In the example (4), the creators, using the aid of physical context, assumes that the meme is not a uttering its message to the reader, rather it is telling a story in which the caption is speaking on behalf of the old man. The caption "I fought war for you" clarify that the old man has endured war for his country expecting good things in the future, but what he saw before his eyes is simply a big disappointment. The caption implies that the old man has fought war so that the future generation can live peacefully, but the teenager who represents the future generation threw his life on petty things such as loving anime character. The contexts involved here are namely physical context, social context and epistemic context.

(5) False Analogy



From the example (5), it can be seen that it is telling factual information. The caption is telling a surprising information to the readers that they can drink lava, which is mind blowing. However, the conventional interpretation of the word "but" on the caption makes a sense of contrast. Considering the words "but" and "only once" rise the implication, the conventional implication of this meme is that one can drink lava, but after that he will die. The creator of meme uses the help of epistemic context to derive the implication of the meme. The implied meaning "Stop Drinking Lava". This is a kind of strong warning for people.

(6) Sarcasm



From this example (6), it can be observed that this meme contains conventional implicature due to its independency from the four Grice's conversational maxims. The keywords here are marked in bold letters as a sign. The conventional interpretation of the word "or" will always used to connect different possibilities. The possibilities provided are smart or British. Meanwhile, British people are known to 'sound' smart due to their unique and intellectual accent. So the words *just British* on the meme conventionally implies that British people are not smart as they sound. This meme is an indirect sarcasm towards British people. This meme is analyzed using the linguistics context, epistemic

context, social context and a little help from physical context. This a sarcastic meme used as a criticism.

(7) Social Events



From the example (7), it can be seen that the image represents awesomeness and confidence. The bottom caption, however, rise the conventional implicature. The bottom caption violates the maxim of manner which requires the speaker to be clear and avoid ambiguity and also maxim of quantity, which is not informative enough. The caption is contrary to what the picture represents, making the caption acts as the Punchline of the meme concluding joke. The meme implied that when the meme creator talks to the girls he likes, he becomes nervous and eventually lost his confidence thus making him stutter. The contexts involved are mainly social, linguistics, and physical contexts.

Contexts

In each meme, there are always some contexts involved when the meme creators produce the picture to represent their ideas. In order to create amusements and entertain the viewers, the creators of the meme usually imply what they stated in the caption by using certain type of context so that only a few who experiences or have the mutual background knowledge about the issue would grasp the message of the meme. There are several contexts influenced the meaning or intention according pragmatics perspective, they are the physical context, epistemic context, linguistics context and social context (Crabtree & Power, 1991).

Furthermore, Cutting, (2002) divides three sorts of contexts, the situational context, what speakers know about they can see around them; the background knowledge context, what they know about each other and the world; and the co-textual context, what they know about what they have been saying. Furthermore, the background knowledge context can be either cultural general knowledge that most people have in their mind about areas of life. And, interpersonal knowledge, specific and possibly private knowledge about the history of the speakers themselves. These contexts influenced the meaning and the intention in internet memes. So, context is a key to understand the meaning or intention pragmatically. It is not only a study of internet memes but also a study of cartoons, especially political cartoons that full of implied meaning in criticizing politicians ironically. (Yanti & Fitri, 2018).

Discussion

Based on the analyzed data, the writers found that there are various contexts that influence the implicature of each internet meme. One of these contexts play a crucial role in order to determine what it is implied and what it is hidden in the memes. However, in case of internet memes, due to varied genres and different purposes, there is no particular dominant context that affects the implicature. It depends on the purpose of the meme, the caption and the picture of the meme itself which is vastly varied. Meanwhile, the implicature in those memes are highly dependent with the influence of one of the described contexts.

On the other hand, the analysis shows that internet memes have relationship and correlation with many factors. These factors are described with some points on the following:

Internet Meme and Social Phenomenon

Several of internet memes are talking about social life phenomena. The memes bring people or readers to a certain phase of their life where bizarre or awkward social situations happened, the superiority of men over women and even men over other men, the behavior of a certain genre that usually persists. Each of these social phenomenon of memes is constantly wrapped in the form of joke which intention is merely to entertain the readers and make the readers reminisce the times when the described phenomenon persists in the reader's individual social life experience. Implicature in internet meme is used in the meme to deliver the joke to the readers.

Internet Meme and Sarcasm

Based on the analysis that has been done, the writers regarded that Internet meme is dominant with sarcasm. To bring sarcasm to the next level is one of the many purposes of the internet meme itself, which nature is to entertain readers all over the world. Even while a meme is discussing social phenomenon or superiority, there is a probability that sarcasm contained in the meme toward the object being spoken. The sarcasm acts as an important element of internet meme as it invoke laughter and entertainment to the readers.

Internet meme and Satire

The writers found that there are a number of internet meme that contain satirical content. The satire is pointed toward many things that happen around the world. Some of the memes ridicule elements of people and culture starting from a government of certain nation, political figure, actor, to youth people and students. The internet memes try to deliver the message indirectly what we called as implicature. Implicature is as a "smooth" way to convey the writer's satirical message through the meme.

4 Conclusion

The enormous information given by internet memes has given people tremendous amount of knowledge. This shared knowledge makes internet memes found its way in the heart of a lot of people around the world as it brings entertainment at a whole different level as most of its ways to entertain are by using the common knowledge of people about the world. But, not everybody can easily digest what an internet meme really means. This happens because an implied meaning of internet meme tends to bound to one or more contexts requiring a reader to possess the mutual context of the meme itself.

After analyzing the data, the writers found that there are implicature in almost every meme. The implicature found in the data are all connected and are influenced by at least two contexts. Based on the analyzed data, the writers assumes in a convincing way that in this research concerning meme, most contexts are related with one another especially physical context due to the image's representation of each of the memes and correlating this context with another context makes the implied meaning easier to derive. Most of the internet memes are dominated with Grice's conventional implicature because there are only a few memes that are dependant with conversational implicature and its maxims.

In the case of internet memes, contexts like social context and epistemic context go hand in hand in deciphering the memes because their aims are almost similar. It happens because when one makes an internet meme, one is putting at least one of his idea that is common in the mind of people or at least have been experienced by majority of people once in a certain phase of their life. That is why epistemic and social contexts are very influential in the hidden meaning of the meme.

From this study, the writers concludes that internet meme has a vast and rich context dependant implicature and it is quite a social media phenomenon that can be studied in many different ways. Internet meme, despite their function as a modern world entertainment in social media which dominantly uses setup and punchline as its "*weapon*" to bring out humor, has putting implicature as

means to hide their true meaning for its reader to figure out. And, it can be used as an “effective way” to criticize politely. This is very interesting topic to study for further research.

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