MISUNDERSTANDING IN SPEECH ACT PERFORMED BY SPEAKER AND HEARER FROM DIFFERENT CULTURES

Yuliana Dg. Macora

Abstract: This paper presents the analysis of misunderstanding occurred in conversations which is caused different misinterpretation of speech act between the speaker and hearer that come from different cultures. Misunderstanding occurred in the conversation causes various emotional effect to the hearer, for example feeling happy, funny, embarrassed, sorry, or has self-assumption and impression of the speaker's utterance. The data are taken from *Facebook* chatting, then they are analyzed under the theories of pragmatics area, especially speech act theory of Austin (1955). Therefore, this paper will try to convey how the misinterpretation of speech act labels affects the participants in the conversation.
Keywords: *speech acts, conversation, misunderstanding*

Language is one of the most important aspects in building communication. According to Nasr (as cited in Attamimi 2011) "languages are said to be unique". Without language, both the verbal and non verbal language, people will not be able to communicate well. In addition, Levinson (1995) states that communication is a complex kind of intention that is achieved or satisfied just by being recognized. However, as an utterance conveyed by a speaker may be interpreted as many more than one meaning by a hearer, even with the existence of language, misinterpretation may happen. Levinson defines an utterance as "the issuance of a sentence, a sentence-analogue, or sentence-fragment, in an actual context". A good communication, of course, needs to be supported by the use of appropriate language in one circumstance with the intention of conveying the correct information or messages to the other participants, so as to avoid misinterpretation. Crowley & Mitchell (as cited in Tupan & Natalia, 2008), support the above explanation that "in a conversation, a speaker and a hearer are supposed to respond to each other in their turn and exchange with the needed information that benefits both of them".

When people are in conversations, they individually consider certain variables, whether consciously or sub-consciously, that help them determine the form that their speech will take. People engaged in conversation typically take a sequence of action to establish and maintain mutual understanding.

The subject of misunderstanding is interesting to discuss because it is something that commonly happens, regardless of time, place, and participants of the conversation. In addition, it gives the writer such a big curiosity to find out some factors affecting misunderstanding and the various emotional effects on the participants appearing in a certain conversation.

One of the factors that cause misinterpretation in human communication is the different interpretation of speech act labels. The same words can be used to perform different speech act; therefore, different words can be used to perform the same speech act (as cited in Thomas, 1995). One utterance which is labelled a question by a speaker may be interpreted differently by a hearer. For instance, the hearer may interpret it as an insult. As a result, this misinterpretation may cause him or her to feel offended. In association with the above opinion, Grundy (2000) in Thomas (1995) adds that "a sentence with interrogative form can be taken not only as a question, but also as an indirect request/ order or as an indirect assertions" (p. 58).

This study wants to analyze the misunderstanding happen in speech act performed by speaker and hearer from different cultures. The speech act difficult sometimes happen for them from different cultures or language that may not really know about another expression or cultural norms, or when they want to transfer their rules and assuming if those are universal.

Speech Act

In expressing something, people do not only produce utterances containing grammatical structures and words, they also perform actions by using those utterances. The term and theory about speech act are firstly introduced by J.L. Austin in 1955 that say the major premise of which is that language is as much, if not more, a mode of action as it is a means of conveying information. Austin used the term speech act to refer to an utterance and the total situation in which the utterance is issued. In English, speech act can be happened

in apology, complaint, ordering, invitation, promise, requesting, refusal, etc. He notices that some utterances seem like statement lack what is thought to be a necessary property of statement that is a truth value. He also argued that that language is not just used to describe or report any particular statement, but also the uttering sentences or normally describe as 'saying something', and to do things, which doing or perform some actions (Duranti, 1997).

In Addition, sentences can be classified into three types, declarative, interrogative, and imperative. There is also addition, which is interjection. Austin (1995) divides declarative sentence based on the meaning, they are *constative* and *performative* sentence. *Constative* sentences is a sentence contains statements, such like *"She woke up late this morning"*, or *"My teacher is so beautiful"*. *Performative* sentence contains some parts of action, what he says it is also what he does, such as *"I am sorry"* or *"I declare you as husband and wife"*.

Speech act proposed by Austin is formulated into three:
1. Locutionary act has meaning of the act of saying something; it produces an understandable utterance and sometimes assigned truth values.
2. Illocutionary act has force; it is informed with a certain tone, attitude, feeling, motive, or intention. It means the performance of an act in saying something as opposed to the performance of an act of saying something. The illocutionary act is closely connected with speaker's intentions, e.g. stating, questioning, promising, requesting, giving commands, threatening and many others.
3. Perlocutionary act has consequence; it has an effect upon the addressee. By describing an imminently dangerous situation (locutionary component) in a tone that is designed to have the force of a warning (illocutionary component), the addresser may actually frighten the addressee into moving (perlocutionary component). It uses for saying something will often, or even normally, produce certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, of the speaker, or of other persons.

Those three components, then, are not altogether separable, for as Austin points out, "we must consider the total situation in which the utterance is issued -- the total speech act -- if we are to see the parallel between statements and performative utterances, and how each can go wrong.

In addition, John Searle (1969), an American philosopher presents a rational taxonomy of types of speech act, besides, he explores the relation between the meaning of sentences and the contexts of their utterances (in Yule, 1996). Here below the one general classification system listing five types of general functions performed by speech acts, they are:
1. Declarations are those kinds of speech acts that change the world via their utterance. For example, appointing, marring, excommunicating, declaring war, christening, dismissing, resigning, sentencing, etc. In order to perform this speech act appropriately, the speaker has to have a special institutional role, in a specific context.
2. Representatives/Assertive, are those kinds of speech acts that state what the speaker believes to be the case or not, such as, statement of facts, insistence, asserting, concluding, boasting, describing, claiming, reporting, complaining, etc.
3. Expressive is the kind of speech acts that state what the speaker feels. They express a psychological state and can be statements of pleasure, pain, likes, dislikes, joy, or sorrow. For example, thanking, apologizing, welcoming, insulting, congratulating, accusing, blaming, praising, condoling, etc.
4. Directives, are hose kinds of speech acts that speakers use to get someone else to do something. They express what the speaker wants. They can be positive or negative. For example, commanding, ordering, requesting, suggesting, challenging, daring, asking, begging, dismissing, excusing, forbidding, warning, instructing, permitting, requiring, recommending, etc.
5. Commissives, are those kinds of speech acts that speakers use to commit themselves to some future action. They express what the speaker intends to do. They can be performed by the speaker alone; or by the speaker as a member of a group. For example promises, threats, refusals, pledges, invitations, swears, volunteers, offers, etc.

Level of Misunderstanding

Misunderstanding is a problem in intercultural communication studies. This misunderstanding has overt and covert reason to be interested empirically; it is because for empirical linguist there is no access to completely covert misunderstandings because they do not show up on the linguistic surface. Only psychotherapists or the like may have

access to them. In the other hands, the majority of all misunderstandings are interactionally somehow managed.

There are basically seven different types of misunderstanding according to Hinnenkamp (1999), they are:

1. Extended variant: The misunderstood segment may be reconstructed by virtue of identifying or localizing it as such and may even become specified by an explicit 'diagnosis' (i.e., realization of the features of the problem in question) or 'anamnesis' (i.e., case history) of the misunderstanding's trajectory. Such explicit diagnoses could be formulations "I think we have a misunderstanding there," or "That's not what I meant," or "I don't mean X, I mean Y" etc.

2. There is an immediate recognition of a misunderstanding, which is indicated by a repair at the next possible opportunity, but there is no return to the *status quo ante*. The misunderstanding itself becomes a resource of continuation.

3. The more extended the misunderstanding's trajectory, it is less likely is a return to the *status quo ante*; instead, a continuation based on the misunderstanding is more likely.

4. There is a gradual recognition of a misunderstanding, which may be indicated by disturbances in the flow of the conversational course, by signs of incoherence, by detours or recyclings (repetitions, paraphrases, circumlocutions, 'talking down'-effects), by unresponded repair initiations, by suddenly or gradually developing traces of verbal, nonverbal, or paralinguistic insecurity, or, simply by the indication or registration of what Erickson and Shultz (1982) have called 'uncomfortable moments', until one interlocutor becomes aware that some kind of misunderstanding has occurred.

5. There is a gradual recognition of a misunderstanding, which may be indicated by disturbances in the flow of the conversational course, in signs of incoherence, by detours or recycling (repetitions, paraphrases, circumlocutions, 'talking down'-effects), by unresponded repair initiations, by suddenly or gradually developing traces of verbal, nonverbal, or paralinguistic insecurity, or, simply by the indication or registration of 'uncomfortable moments,' until the misunderstanding is somehow recognized

6. There is no obvious recognition of a misunderstanding, although an outside observer regards it as a misunderstanding; or one of the participants may have received particular information afterwards (even long time after) that leads her to reassess the interaction (or parts of it) as a misunderstanding.

7. To an outside observer there is no manifestation and no indication that a misunderstanding has occurred, yet one interlocutor (or even both interlocutors) may have the feeling that either she has or was or they have or were misunderstood. So the misunderstanding may have been noticed but remained unnegotiated. (Source: Journal of Intercultural Communication).

Face Wants

It is said previously that interpreting an utterance involves both a speaker and a hearer; in addition, it will also affect the participants emotionally. In politeness theory 'face' is understood as every individual's feeling of self-image; which can be damaged, maintained or enhanced through interaction with others (Thomas, 1995). According to Mey (2001), the term 'face', as an explanatory concept in human interaction, was originally introduced by Erving Goffman. In line with the above explanation, Yule (1996) also adds that "within everyday social interaction, people generally behave as if their expectations concerning their public self-image, or their face wants, will be respected" (p. 61).

Trosborg (1995) argues that people are allowed to defend their faces if threatened, and when defending their own faces they are likely to threaten other people's faces in turn. In achieving smooth and successful communication, the participants in an interaction should maintain each other's face.

There are two kinds of face wants. The first is called face threatening act and the second is face saving act. Yule (1996) mentions that "if a speaker says something that represents a threat to another individual's expectations regarding self-image, it is described as a face threatening act" (p. 61). When face is being threatened interaction, it comes under attack. Brown and Levinson (as cited in Thomas, 1995) also implies that 'face threatening acts' happen when certain utterances are likely to damage or threaten another person's face. Moreover, Yule (1996) mentions that a face saving act happens when a speaker say something to lessen the possible threat.

Methodology

This study is qualitative descriptive since the data of the research are collected in form of words and sentences. The study is conducted by doing observation of socio-cultural communication. The data are taken from some chatting conversations in *Writer* that conducting by speakers and hearers from different cultures. In collecting and analyzing the data, the writer reads many *Writer* chatting during Desember 2013 to find out any conversations of speaker and hearer from different cultures. Then, the data are selected and classified, which are in the form of sentences or phrases as the utterance of conversation which cause misinterpretation. After that, the writer makes the transcription of the data. Finally, the data are analyzed by focusing on the misinterpretation which have been caused by different interpretation of speech act labels.

Findings

1.   First Conversation

The first conversation was among a married Posonese Woman namely Lani Ngiode (LN) with her close friend, Anna Ayu (AA) and two foreigner relatives, Goldy Swiss (GS) and Tauheed Ahmad (TA). LN made a status on *Facebook*, and the three of her relatives were commenting on it.

LN   :   (STATUS) "You know me so well. Dear I LOVE U!"

GS   :   I love u *to*.

GS   :   So well *sweety*.

TA   :   Thanks.

AA   :   *Lani puber, napa ngana pe bule. Te pernah absen dia dalam setiap statusmu… hai dodo… bae-bae lea Ka'Ipul dapa tau nanti dia marah ngana…* (Lani bitchy, there are your *bule* (foreigner). They are never absent in every your status. Look that. Be careful *Ka'Ipul* (LN's husband) will be angry with you).

LN: *Macam kita tulis status juga buat dia kah? Cuma dia yang merasa saja. Co liat itu bule yang 1 lagi bilang trima kasih le… pe merasa skali…* (Am I writing the status for him? That's just his assumption. Look to the another foreigner, he says thanks. He's very impression).

AA   :   *Bagemana ngana kalo itu bule bakoment ngana balas-balas juga. Tapi te apa-apa, Ka'Ipul juga te tau bahasa Inggris juga toh? Hahahaha… Eee, berapa ngana pe teman-teman yang bule kah?* (It's because if they are commenting, you always reply them. But, that's all right. Your husband doesn't know English too, does he? Hahahahaha. Hey, how many your foreign relatives are?)

GS :   What means Lani?

LN :   Yes Goldi. My friend said you and me so romantic in every comment on FB… hehehehe

TA :   Reallyyyy? Lani you are romantic on Facebook… Hehehehe… I not think so.

GS :   OK sweetheart.

LN actually made the status for her husband, but it was misunderstood by some of her friends from abroad countries. They thought the status was writing for them. Then, when they did not know what LN speaks to AA, one of them tried to fix it with LN. But the answer was contrary with the fact. LN said to GS that they were very romantic in every status and comments, but TA disagreed with that. It can be seen when GS said *"I love you, too. So well sweety"*, LN just replied by saying *"Thanks"*, and made chat with AA that she did not care with GS was said. It was just because GS have his self-assumption and impression. Also in doing the conversation, it looks like they used casual English to make it universal for others. But they did not really care with the structure or grammar. They spoke as well as among them understood with the meaning actually.

2.   Second Conversation

The second conversation comes from Lani Ngiode's (LN) comment on Facebook to her friend Laura Persoon (LP) from Illinois.

LN   :   Hey look your baby is so funny…

LP   :   What do you mean by "funny" to my baby?

LN   :   Ooh… I'm sorry. I mean your baby is so cute. Sorry to say funny to your baby. Because in Indonesia, "funny" also means "cute". Sorry.

LP   :   Okay… ☺

Misunderstanding is also happen in this conversation when LN commented to LP's baby picture. The baby looked so handsome and cute. LN felt passionate and want to comment the baby's picture, but she used a word "funny". She thought, funny's meaning in Indonesia is same with funny in English. In Indonesia funny can be meant both of something amusing and cute also, but LP misunderstood with what she was said. LP became offended because her baby was said as something funny, even the baby did not do something amusing. Then LN apologized and explained that she was thinking in Indonesian concept of funny, it was different with English concept of funny actually.

LN did illocutionary act when she showed her feeling in say that the baby was so funny. In the first time, it looks like she want to make a close relation with her friend by gave a state – for the baby, but later this state rose a misunderstanding to the hearer. LN used an Indonesian perspective to state "funny", but LP seemed like angry and disagreed when her baby boy was said as funny. Then to explained their both misunderstanding, LN apologized to LP and explained that she was wrong, she tried to reconstruct the identifying meaning of what she said before. So that, in this case happen misunderstanding level one – extended variant, it can be identified by her sentence *"Ooh… I'm sorry. I mean your baby is so cute".* LN recognizes her mistake and re-explains her words "funny" in English perspective "cute". Afterwards both party can be understood each other.

Discussion

In the first conversation, the illocutionary act happened. When LN made her status, immediately GS replied by showing his feeling and intention to it. He thought that the status was for him, that actually LN made it for her husband. As note, LN and GS were always making a close conversation such likes a conversation between couple. In writer's mind, LN hid her marriage status in *Facebook* and became extrovert to foreign relatives that who want to make a close relation. Then it made GS was in feeling happy and replying with nice words to show his attention.

The misunderstanding in this case happens when GS felt that the status wrote for him, actually LN did not recognize it with her friend AA. Then, when GS tried to fix it to LN what were they talking about, LN said that both of them were very romantic in every their status and comments. In the other hand, TA disagreed with what LN has argued. TA aware that there was misunderstanding happened in GS party. This misunderstanding includes in level six that there is no obvious recognition of the misunderstanding. Even though the third party aware of it, but the other participants receive it as information without misunderstanding. They still keep the interaction goes on.

Then in second conversation, LN did illocutionary act when she showed her feeling in say that the baby was so funny. In the first time, it looks like she want to make a close relation with her friend by gave a state – for the baby, but later this state rose a misunderstanding to the hearer. LN used an Indonesian perspective to state "funny", but LP seemed like angry and disagreed when her baby boy was said as funny. Then to explained their both misunderstanding, LN apologized to LP and explained that she was wrong, she tried to reconstruct the identifying meaning of what she said before. So that, in this case happen misunderstanding level one – extended variant

In both cases above, we can see that misunderstanding happen when a Posonese woman, LN, was talking with her foreign relatives. Sometimes, they were misunderstood with what LN was talking about. In the first conversation, LN seen like does not to fix or repair the misunderstanding happen among them. It is because; she thinks that it was not her mistake to raise the problem, it just the foreigners has himself assumption and impression. In the second conversation, LN realizes that happen misunderstanding between she and her relatives. Then, she tries to explain more of her mistaken and apologize with it.

Conclusion and Suggestion

Misunderstanding can be happened in every communication domain when we are doing speech. Almost of them happen in people who come from different culture background. Become both speaker and hearer, we need cross cultural understanding to communicate with other people we are speaking to.

What can be most strongly deduced from those example (as well as from the other ones as well) is that a different interpretation or inference that initially led to a misunderstanding might be solved and clarified by a common repair, even if the misunderstanding may be interculturally based (which we often cannot determine). So, the discussion of those *Facebook* chatting transcript will certainly not suffice as empirical evidence of the universal validity of repair-within-misunderstanding events. What the writer intended to show in the discussion of my

examples and in particular with the *Facebook* chatting example was to unfold a *methodological* reflection on the delicate issue of misunderstanding in combination with that other delicate issue called 'interculturality.' If some scholars think that they can easily combine the two, they are very likely to fall victim to a methodological shortcoming.

　　　This study gives simple examples of misunderstanding that happened in conversation among people from different culture background, in this case Posonese with foreign people. Hopefully, the reader can develop this study in either different culture background or domain of communication with more problems of cross culture misunderstanding.

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About the Author
Yuliana Dg. Macora was born in Poso, 4th April, 1986. She finished off her Elementary School until Senior High School in Poso, Central Sulawesi. She earned her Sarjana Degree on Sintuwu Maroso University and her Master Degree from Hasanuddin University. Now she is a lecturer at Englis h Education Study Program of Sintuwu Maroso University. Her interest is in Applied Linguistics in Teaching English. She can be contacted at 085341018695 and *ydgmacora@gmail.com.*