

EDITORIAL

Social/interpersonal context plays an important role in shaping the meaning of an utterance. Social context is, strictly speaking, extralinguistic (Lakoff, 1972: 911). Lakoff argues that “one must be able to refer to assumptions about the social context of an utterance, as well as to other implicit assumptions made by the participants in a discourse” (907). Regarding the complexity and changeable characteristic of social context, one should never take for granted that one rule of communication can apply in all situations. A communication under a special condition requires different rule application; something that is polite in normal context may become rude in a special context. Failure to observe the social context leads to a communication failure such as misinterpretation and offense. Therefore, one must exercise his/her sensitiveness even to the slightest change in the social context in order to make the communication successful.

Tactfulness applies in both normal and special situations. Any types of communication, be it in private or public domain, will be carried out successfully if it follows a mutually understood mechanism. A basic, simple mechanism of communication works this way: the speaker, on one side, want his/her message to be delivered successfully while the interlocutors, on the other side wants the message being delivered is understandable and appropriate with their emotional state. Sometimes, it is not easy to measure the emotional state of the interlocutors and the level of complexity of message they can understand. In a public communication the difficulty lies in the heterogeneity of the interlocutors, while in a private communication the difficulty can be related to the idiosyncrasy of the interlocutor.

Dell Hyme’s SPEAKING, an established theory in the study of communication, helps one to assess the appropriacy of his/her utterance in a communication. Hymes proposes that a speech

event has 8 components, which are setting, participant, end, act-sequence, key, instrument, norm, and genre (Farah, 1998: 126), quoted in (Johnston and Marcellino, 2010). Indeed, universality exists in speech events to make this theory applicable. However, one should never ignore the culture, which also gives meaningful contribution to those components. For instance, the way western society build the relationship (among participant) within a particular speech event might be different from the Indonesian way. For Indonesian context, Poedjosoedarmo (1985), quted in (Surtantini, 2014: 89–90) offers a more detailed, culture-specific speech components O,O,E MAU BICARA which are O1 (Speaker), O2 (Interlocutor), E (Emotion), M (Ends), A (O3, Bystander), U (Sequence), B (Topic), I (instrument), C (Speaker’s Tone), A (scene), R (Register), and A (Norm).

Tactfulness does not fall into only one element. It is a comprehensive summary of all elements, so, if one element is missing, the degree of tactfulness may lower. For instance, if one accurately measures the degree of intimacy between participants but misses the setting, he/she potentially embarasses the other, or worst, offends the other, which, in turn disrupts the communication.

Javanese offers a thoughtful phrase “pana in basa” which roughly translates into “showing good manners in using language” that Indonesia future leaders should seriously consider of taking. It does not mean that one cannot use harsh words, or irony in one’s speech; it is more as “empan papan”, being relevant and suiting the topic to the event. One may say exactly the same utterance but produces different responses in different occasions. For instance, to say that ‘Indonesian is a kind of inferior to westerners’ will not offend our national pride if this statement is made by an Indonesian leader and delivered in a public sphere among Indonesians. It will be taken as an autocriticism. On the other hand, it will cause a protest across the

nation if it is made by another country leader in an international forum as it will likely be regarded as an attack to our pride as a nation.

Commenting on anything sensitive, e.g. related to the issue of religion, race, or tribe requires extra attention to use of both language and politeness strategy. Words may be ambiguous and misinterpreted. In addition, if politeness is understood narrowly –only in terms of language form without considering SPEAKING or O,O,E MAU BICARA speech components–, it still carries the potential of hurting the interlocutors. In other words, a statement can be very polite if analyzed from the surface structure, but it hurts the interlocutors' feeling when expressed in inappropriate tone.

To please everyone is impossible, but being tactful in order not to hurt anyone is a must. Being humble is the best policy. Being 'proud of oneself' may trap one to sound aloof, or judged as attacking others' softest side. One is lucky for being inherently humble and eloquent, so it is relatively easy for him/her to not sound aloof. He/she must be grateful for this splendid gift from God. Some others may put extra efforts to prevent themselves from appearing arrogant. The old

saying "experience is the best teacher" continues to be relevant across time. Hopefully the incident of "slip of the mind" by one of the candidates during the gubernatorial campaign in Jakarta that drew comment from the Indonesian Council of Ulama (<http://www.voa-islam.com>) becomes a good lesson to learn for everyone who wants to build harmony in diversity in Indonesia. (AM).

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