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PROMOTING
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Brawijaya University

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Promoting Creative Literacy in Digital Age



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Promoting Creative Literacy in Digital Age

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Linguistic Expressions in Digital Communication: A Social Phenomenon

Nurul Chojimah

The advancement of technology affects all aspects of life, including communication. The massive use of the Internet in general and social media in particular is one of the characteristics of communication at present. Space and time do not hamper communication. Face-to-face communication is superseded by the online one. This change enables us to communicate with unlimited number of people in a very few time. This drastic change linguistically affects styles of communication. Simplification of linguistic expressions, semantic changes, and the common use of sarcasm are just three cases in point.

Simplification

The shift of the communication style in the digital era is traceable from the simplification of verbal expressions. The use of abbreviations and emoticons is the evidence of the simplification. Abbreviation is a short form of words or phrases. In general, it is formed by taking the first letter of each word in a phrase. The expression *Oh my God* is shortened into *OMG*, the phrase *on the way* is substituted by *OTW*, the prayer saying *get better soon* is replaced with *GBS*, the expression *by the way* is simplified in *BTW*, and the sentence *I need to talk to you later* is compacted into *TTYL*.

In addition to abbreviation, many verbal expressions are nowadays shifted into visual ones by way of emoticons. Emoticon is visualization of the addresser's feeling or intentions. In such a case, an addresser might express his/her excitement or confusion without having to write it. His/her state of feeling is conveyed through some images. As such, it replaces verbal expressions. The sentence *I am happy* is represented in a smiling

face or clapping hands, and the statement *I am confused* is visualized in a frowning face. Due to the use of abbreviations and emoticons, communication gets succinct and simple.

The simplification is not without any impact to the daily communication. Abbreviations originating from the Internet, in particular social media, are slipped into our daily communication. It is very common for us to say *otw* in daily communication in replace for *I am on my way* or *I am on the way*, and *btw* to replace *by the way*. Besides, the habit of simplifying in the digital communication tends to be applied in formal communication such as in academic writing. Instead of using a capital letter, students frequently write the pronoun *I* in a small letter. *In this chapter, i present...* is an example.

Meaning 'Invention'

The other linguistic effect of the digital communication is semantic changes of some words. The words *google* and *selfie* are the words undergoing semantic changes and are massively used nowadays. The word *google* whose original word is *googol* means ten raised to the hundredth power. At present, *google* is considered as a verb, means to search information on the Internet. As such the 'invented' meaning is due to the fact that there is a searching engine—*google*—from which any information we need can be obtained.

The word *self* which means an expression of reflective action is modified into *selfie*. The modification results in a new meaning: *taking our picture by ourselves*. The new meaning is 'invented' since the word *self* is frequently combined with a noun or adjective whose meaning is an action directed to oneself or itself, i.e. *Self-funded* means funding by oneself, and *self-education* means educating by oneself such as by reading. This linguistic regularity is then applied to denote taking pictures by oneself. As such, the modified form has narrowing process of meaning since it is restricted to the activity of taking picture.

Sarcasm

The other characteristic of communication in this digital era is the use of sarcasm. It is evident that sarcasm is something common for netters (Internet users). Commenting on a certain case, netters frequently use

sarcastic expressions. It seems that sarcasm is not something touchy anymore. In general, sarcasm can be understood as a verbal aggression. It contains mockery or ridicule intended to offend targeted parties or people. It commonly has destructive purposes such as degrading and humiliating others.

Sarcasm can be realized directly and indirectly. The direct sarcasm is commonly realized through the use of words having negative connotations such as labelling targeted parties or people with the name of animals. By contrast, sarcasm can also be realized in indirect manner by way of irony. *His intelligence is equal with Einstein's* is the mockery realized in irony when it is used to attribute someone having the low intelligence.

What happens with those changes?

Despite the limited number of data, the examples presented earlier suggest that the digital communication affects to the linguistic domain. Many factors contribute to the changes, one of which is the nature of the language. It is believed by Fairclough that language is a socially-conditioned process. It suggests that language is not static, but dynamic. The dynamics of the language is traceable from changes happening in the level of sound, word/phrase, syntax, and semantic.

At present, viewed from the spread of information, the world is borderless. What happens in a certain country might be viewed by citizens from other continents at the moment of the event. Indonesians are able to monitor presidential election in the US lively, and they could see the rites of pilgrimage in the Holy land. The fast spread of information implies that we are demanded to be efficient in many ways, including in time and space management, otherwise we would be left behind. We are demanded to utilize time and space as maximally as possible. This demand eventually forces us to think and act fast. Practicality becomes the main consideration in any action. This social condition subtly affects our communication style. Expressions in a long phrase are superseded with abbreviations, acronyms, and emoticons because the last three linguistic styles are considered to be much more efficient and practical. In short, the linguistic simplification in communication in the digital era cannot be separated from the social condition of language users.

The tenet of Fairclough quoted earlier can also be used to view the meaning 'invention' or semantic changes described in the previous paragraph. The massive use of the Internet and smartphone is the social condition faced by language users nowadays. This condition facilitates them to 'recreate' the language. Coining new words such as *google* for denoting the activity of searching information in the Internet and creating a new meaning for existing words as in the case of *selfie* is the evidence of the language users' creation. The creation is triggered by the social condition they face. It confirms that language and social condition are mutually influential.

What happens with sarcasm? Cyber space communication is different from the conventional one. Face-to-face communication is replaced with the online one because of which communication is done mostly in written form. One of the merits of written language is that it can eliminate psychological barrier between or among participants. Expressing comments sarcastically is included into a face threatening act. Such an act might cause inconvenience in the parts of both the addressee and the addressor. Extending a criticism might make an addresser inconvenient since she/he realizes that her/his statement would threaten her/his addresser. This inconvenience, however, could be eliminated if the communication is done in written form. Communicating in written form, people tend express their thought more freely. Fulfilling the addresser's positive and negative face is not their priority. Pouring all their thought is the main point, despite the fact that their thought is full of hate and mockery. This might explain why sarcasm gets common in the online communication.

Indeed, language is one of amazing human's creation. It does not stay still, but it keeps evolving. Social condition is one of the determinant factors of the development of the language. In spite of the fact that technology affects all aspects of life, the massive use of it, however, should not eradicate universal values such as politeness.