THE REASONS FOR USING EMOJIS ON WHATSAPP CHATS: A CASE STUDY OF INDONESIAN STUDENTS' TRANSLINGUAL PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

Translingual practice recognizes language repertoire in which both linguistics and non-linguistics sources are put together in one's brain and used when necessary (Canagarajah, 2013). Since one's language repertoire is different from others, the language produced might also be different. The offline and online contexts might also differentiate the production of the language. In online communication, such as communication through WhatsApp, ones can interpret the linguistics and non-linguistic codes differently, including the emojis which are available in WhatsApp. Due to the different language repertoire, there must be reasons why emojis are used differently by WhatsApp users. This present study aims to find the reasons why emojis are used on WhatsApp chats which are written by students in academic contexts. The data is emojis used in WhatsApp chats used by five university students in a private university in Indonesia. Even though only five participants are joining this study, it aims to examine in-depth reasons why the emojis are used in WhatsApp chats. The data is gained by asking the participants to convert the WhatsApp chats to Word files. In addition, to know the detailed information about the interpretations of the use of emojis in WhatsApp, this study applied MIMI (The Mobile Instant Messaging Interview) (Kaufmann & Peil, 2020; Gibson, 2020; Enochsonn, 2011). It is analyzed by using Netnography (Kozinets, 2015). The results show that there are six reasons why the emojis are used on WhatsApp chats. It can be concluded that in Translingual Practice, language is not fixed; instead, the meaning emerges in the language contact zone.
Keywords: emoji; WhatsApp; translingual practice; Indonesian context

ABSTRAK

Praktek translingual mengakui repertoar bahasa di mana sumber linguistik dan non-linguistik disatukan di repertoar Bahasa seseorang dan digunakan bila diperlukan (Canagarajah, 2013). Karena repertoar bahasa seseorang berbeda dari yang lain, bahasa yang dihasilkan mungkin juga berbeda. Konteks dalam offline dan online mungkin juga membedakan produksi bahasa. Dalam komunikasi online, seperti komunikasi melalui WhatsApp, kode linguistik dan non-linguistik dapat diinterpretasikan secara berbeda, termasuk emoji yang tersedia di WhatsApp. Karena repertoar bahasa yang berbeda, pasti ada alasan mengapa emoji digunakan secara berbeda oleh pengguna WhatsApp. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menemukan alasan mengapa emoji digunakan pada chat WhatsApp yang ditulis oleh mahasiswa dalam konteks akademik. Data dalam penelitian ini merupakan emoji yang digunakan dalam obrolan WhatsApp yang digunakan oleh lima mahasiswa di salah satu perguruan tinggi swasta di Indonesia. Meski hanya lima partisipan yang mengikuti penelitian ini, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji secara mendalam alasan mengapa emoji digunakan dalam obrolan WhatsApp.Data diperoleh dengan meminta peserta untuk mengonversi obrolan WhatsApp ke file word. Selain itu, untuk mengetahui informasi detail tentang interpretasi penggunaan emoji di WhatsApp, penelitian ini menerapkan MIMI (The Mobile Instant Messaging Interview) (Kaufmann & Peil, 2020; Gibson, 2020; Enochsonn, 2011). Setelah itu, data dianalisis dengan menggunakan Netnografi (Kozinets, 2015). Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa ada tujuh alasan mengapa emoji digunakan pada obrolan WhatsApp. Dapat disimpulkan bahwa dalam Praktek Translingual, makna bahasa merupakan entity yang tidak tetap; sebaliknya, makna muncul dalam zona kontak bahasa.
***Kata Kunci:** emoji; WhatsApp; praktek translingual; konteks di Indonesia*

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INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, lecturers and students can communicate by making use of online applications, such as WhatsApp in the academic context (Pokrovskaia, et.al, 2022). Both the lecturers and students made use of all of the WhatsApp features to communicate, along with text messaging. There have been several WhatsApp features that can be used in chats, one of them is the emojis. The use of the text and the emojis, cannot be separated since it is believed that all of them are stored in one's language repertoire in the human brain and used when necessary. It can be said that in language repertoire, communication transcends the word since multimodalities can also be used to express the meaning. Canagarajah (2013) proposed the term translingual practice to explain the unique language repertoire used to express the meanings. As mentioned earlier, emojis can also be used to express meaning in WhatsApp chats. It can substitute for the text or strengthen the words sent as WhatsApp texts. It can be put at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of the text. In addition, several same or different emojis can be added to WhatsApp chats (Barton & Lee, 2013). García and Kleyn (2016) state that the use of all of the language repertoire is not related to the structure and meanings of one named language. Therefore, this study aims to find the reasons why emojis are used on WhatsApp chats between lecturers and students made by Indonesians in the academic context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Translingual Practice

Translingual Practice believes that languages are not fixed, instead, languages emerge in the language contact zone (Pennycook, 2010). It means that meanings are not determined by the forms of the language, instead, meanings are determined by the language users in the language contact zone, such as WhatsApp. Pennycook (2008) also states that the source of the language, as well as the local language, affects the meaning-making of a language in the contact zone. He uses the term lingua franca English to describe the language used in the contact zone, in which language is seen as a non-fixed system or product.

The emergence of translingual practice in language contact zone is due to the language repertoire. Language repertoire is defined as all languages available in one's brain and used when needed in the language contact zone. The language is also used depending on the context. In translingual practice, language repertoire is not bound to any particular named language socially and politically (García & Kleyn, 2016) since the language in one's repertoire is produced in the language contact zone. Therefore, it is said that language repertoire is unique (Garcia, 2009). Even though the source might be the same, it might be used differently depending on the contact zone.

The evidence of language repertoire in translingual practice has therefore shifted the term 'language' into 'languaging' which refers to the process of using the language by the language users. It is not talking about the standard nor the forms of any named languages (Wei, 2017). While WhatsApp users send the text, they use the languaging since what text or multimodalities sent emerged from the context. In addition, rarely do WhatsApp users use the correct forms of one named language, such as English, in all of the chats (Albawardi, 2018).

In conclusion, Canagarajah (2013) stated that translingual practice sees language in the contact zone as communication that transcends the individual languages as well as transcends the words and languages. It is stated that communication transcends individual language since language users cannot separate different languages stored in their repertoire; instead, they are mixed in the language repertoire and used when needed in communication. (Canagarajah (2013) also states that communication transcends words and languages since language repertoire

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consists of all diverse semiotic resources. In its application in online communication, there has been a lot of evidence since all of the languages, together with the diverse multimodalities available in online applications are used for meaning-making (Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014).

Emojis

Pennycook (2008) claims that language emerged in the language contact zone depending on the language resources. It can be said that emojis are used by WhatsApp users since it is available in WhatsApp as one of its features for meaning-making. The emojis are used spontaneously as a blend of orality and literacy which emerges in WhatsApp as the language contact zone (Srhir, Vázquez, & Varela, 2019). There are no fixed meanings of emojis used; it is used differently which transcends the word and languages (Canagarajah, 2013). Silalahi (2022) shows that there is a change in the meanings of emojis used in social media. An emoji of a fruit, such as an eggplant can be interpreted used to show male genitalia by WhatsApp users. Adams (2017) also stated that the use of emojis is closely related to one's culture. He also stated that emojis can be used to show who the person is in online communication by using emojis.

As previously stated, there is no fixed meaning of emojis used in online communications; people just list all emojis used in online communication, together with their possible meanings. They are all posted on several websites, such as https://emojipedia.org. On that website, there are categories of emojis, such as emojis for smileys and people, animals and nature, food and drink, activity, travel and places, objects, symbols, and flags. It also contains pictures of emojis, a description of the emoji, together with a common definition of the emoji. The emojis used can be inserted at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of a WhatsApp chat. The WhatsApp users, in this case, the lecturers and students, can also choose the colors of certain emojis used and the number of inserted emojis in the chats.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research framework is applied since this study discusses the reasons why emojis are used in the academic context on WhatsApp chats. Polkinghorne (2005) stated that qualitative research is used when the study discusses spoken and written expression. In short, the qualitative research framework is particularly suitable for exploring and understanding meanings." (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The lecturer and student participants are selected following Gibson's theory (2020). They must be young and have installed WhatsApp on the device. The data of this study are WhatsApp chats between lecturers and students in a private university in Jakarta, Indonesia. There are five students whose chats are analyzed. Not all of the students use emojis while texting their lecturers through WhatsApp. The five of them are chosen since they use a lot of emojis while texting their lecturers through WhatsApp. All of the participants' names are written in pseudonyms. The data was the emojis used in WhatsApp chats taken in one semester in an academic calendar, which is from September 2022 to February 2023. To gather the data, the participants save the WhatsApp chats and export them into a Word document. Later it is sent by WhatsApp to the researcher. The interpretations of each emoji are asked through a semi-structured interview by applying MIMI (The Mobile Instant Messaging Interview) (Kaufmann & Peil, 2020; Gibson, 2020, Enochsonn, 2011). After that, the interpretation of emojis used in WhatsApp is analyzed by applying netnography (Kozinets, 2015). The data in detail was selected by applying moment analysis (Wei, 2011).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Emojis have been used in WhatsApp in the language contact zone to deliver the meanings. As a part of one's language repertoire, there have been six reasons why an emoji was used on WhatsApp chats.

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1. Showing the Real Facial Expressions or Gestures

The emojis could be used in WhatsApp to show real facial expressions or gestures as if they were in a face-to-face conversation. The WhatsApp user below used an emoji of a smiling face with an open mouth and cold sweat. Leonard was the student and Miranda was his lecturer.

> 11/21/22, 14:33 - Leonard: yes miss, she didn't take the test
> 11/21/22, 14:33 - Miranda: laahhh.. why?
> 11/21/22, 14:33 - Leonard: she got up late, miss. She forgot there is an exam
> 11/21/22, 14:34 - Miranda: OMG
> 11/21/22, 14:35 - Leonard: yes miss 😅

In the interview, the WhatsApp user stated that she used this emoji to show an awkward laugh. The sweat in the emoji showed awkwardness. The users did not use the common emoji of laugh, such as 🙂 since she had to show some respect to the lecturer. On the one hand, the student thought that the use of sweat could be interpreted as a condition of being afraid when he met the lecturer in person. On the other hand, the lecturer did not understand that the sweat was interpreted as showing respect to her since she had never been in that condition while seeing the student. In short, it can be said that the emojis were interpreted differently by WhatsApp users, depending on the real facial expression that was imaged by its user.

In another context, Leonard, Miranda's student was using a raised fist emoji. They were talking about the registration of a seminar.

> 11/14/22, 14:36 - Miranda: please register
> 11/14/22, 14:45 - Leonard: sure miss, I have already told my friends..
> 11/14/22, 14:47 - Miranda: sip, thank you.. please register.. it is a very rare opportunity
> 11/14/22, 14:50 - Leonard: ok miss, I have already registered✊

Leonard stated that he chose the raised fist emoji to show the high spirit. He was very eager to attend the seminar. Leonard would also raise his fist if were a face-to-face conversation.

In the excerpt below, Miranda who was Merry's undergraduate thesis supervisor talked about the thesis consultation schedule. Merry used a smiling face emoji.

> 9/22/22, 13:00 - Merry: How about you miss?
> 9/22/22, 13:01 - Merry: Please guide me, ms. Miranda🙏🙂
> 9/22/22, 13:02 - Miranda: ok. ok, on Thursday at 3.30 ya

Merry stated that she used that emoji together with the folded hands emoji to show that she was smiling politely at the lecturer. Merry thought that without the folded hands emoji, the smiling face emoji would be too rude. Merry also stated that she usually folded her hands and smiled politely in real conversation. That is why she also used those emojis in WhatsApp.

2. Similar Meaning

Emojis in WhatsApp were also used to show similar feelings as the emojis stated. In the excerpt below, an emoji of a loudly crying face was used by the students. Amelia was the student and Miranda was the lecturer.

> 12/7/22, 17:14 - Amelia: I am sorry miss I thought miss has already finished talking, so I turned off the WhatsApp call 😭
> 12/7/22, 17:15 - Miranda: Oh no problem

The results of the interview stated that Amelia used the emoji of the crying face to show regret; she did not literally cry when she used this emoji. The other participant also used the same emoji of loudly crying; this time, the interpretation is different from Amelia's.

This finding showed a different result from finding 1. In this case, the emoji was not interpreted based on the real condition; instead, it was used based on similar meanings. The students stated that the crying

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emoji had a similar meaning to the feeling of regret.

3. Culture

The use of emojis as a part of one's language repertoire is closely related to the culture. Leonard used an emoji of folded hands in the excerpt below. Miranda was informing the additional class where Leonard was the captain of the class.

> 12/16/22, 17:40 - Miranda: Extra Class English Grammar 3
> Sabtu, 17 Desember · 1.00 – 2.00pm
> Info akses Google Meet
> Link panggilan video: https://meet.google.com/wee-uatn-scn
> Atau panggil: (US) +1 319-359-7156, PIN: 864 187 854#
> 12/16/22, 17:41 - Leonard: okay miss, thank youuuu🙏

It can be seen that before the emoji, Leonard wrote: "Thank you". In that excerpt, the folded hands emoji was used to strengthen the text "thank you". Leonard stated that the folded hands had the same meaning as the word thank you. Since in some other places, the folded hands emoji could be used to show a prayer, it can be said that the use of emoji was related to the culture. The student did not pray by folding his hand; he folded his hands when he said thank you.

4. Substituting for the Text

Next, the folded hands emoji could also be interpreted as expressing a request or permission, as can be seen in the excerpt below:

> 2/1/23, 10:01 - Naura: Miss Can I go to Icare (from the toilet) I was throwing up just now🙏
> 2/13/23, 14:09 - Miranda: OMG, OK, take care

In the excerpt above, Naura used a folded hands emoji after a request. She would like to show thank you. Instead of writing it down,

she used the folded hands emojis to deliver the meaning of a thank you. This is also related to the culture where the student folded her hands to show gratitude.

In another context, a thumb-up emoji was used to substitute for the text.

> 2/2/23, 07:24 - Miranda: I am conducting a research about the use of emojis in WhatsApp. Can I interview you? (Ask questions through WhatsApp) about the meanings of emojis that you use in WhatsApp?
> 2/2/23, 07:30 - Amelia Morning miss
> 2/2/23, 07:30 - Amelia: Sure miss👍

Amelia stated that she was using the thumb-up emoji to show that she had no problem with the request. She used it in an informal conversation. In addition, Amelia usually used this emoji to close the conversation with no text embedded. Instead of writing down a leave-taking message, she used a thumb of emoji.

In the excerpt below, Felicia used a folded hands emoji and triple wide smile emojis to substitute for a text in WhatsApp chats. They were talking about the revision of Felicia's thesis.
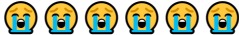
> 12/16/22, 23:31 - Miranda: Fel.. can we talk about it tomorrow?
> 12/16/22, 23:31 - Miranda: at about 9
> 12/16/22, 23:31 - Miranda: I am so sleepy
> 12/16/22, 23:32 - Felicia: Hehe ok miss. We'll talk about all of them tomorrow at 9 yaa miss
> good nite miss🙏 😁 😁 😁
> 12/16/22, 23:32 - Miranda: nite Fel

The triple wide smile emojis and a folded hand emoji were used to show readiness. The student was ready for the thesis consultation. In addition, those emojis also showed an open mind. The student understood that the lecturer was sleepy; it was her fault that she texted the lecturer late at night.

More than one emoji could also be used to substitute for the text. This use is also related to the reason for strengthening the text.

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In the excerpt below, Leonard used six crying emojis while texting the lecturers.

11/21/22, 14:43 - Leonard: 😭😭😭😭😭😭
11/21/22, 14:43 - Leonard: from Susan again, miss😭🙏

Next, the loudly crying emoji on the second line was interpreted by Leonard as showing denial, even though he did not write it down in the chats. Leonard would like to say that the previous emojis were sent by another student who used Leonard's WhatsApp. Even though the student used the same crying emoji as the one used in Excerpt 2, the meaning is different.

5. Strengthening the Text

Emojis could also be used to strengthen the text in WhatsApp chats. In the excerpt below, the folded hands emoji were used twice in a row. Below is the WhatsApp chat between Miranda and Amelia who was Miranda's student.

1/31/23, 07:36 - Miranda: Can we reschedule to, let's say at 10.30?
1/31/23, 07:36 - Amelia: Sure miss
1/31/23, 07:37 - Amelia: I am sorry miss, is that possible to finish the thesis consultation before 3? I have a job interview at 3, miss🙏🙏
1/31/23, 07:39 - Miranda: Hahahha don't worry

In the excerpt above, Amelia used two folded hands emojis in a row to show that she was very sorry. Even though Amelia had already written down the word 'sorry' in the text, she still used the double folded hands emojis to strengthen the written text. She also claimed that double emojis would make the texts even stronger.

In another case, an OK emoji was used to strengthen the text. In the excerpt below, Miranda who was the lecturer, and Morgan, who was the student, the students were having a meeting at that time; Miranda was a bit late.

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2/15/22, 14:31 - Miranda: Pls ask your friends to wait
2/15/22, 14:32 - Morgan: Okay miss👌

Morgan used the emoji of OK to emphasize the word 'okay' she previously used. This emoji was used to make sure that the there was no problem with the students. The lecturer did not need to be worry.

In the context below, Amelia used laughing emojis to strengthen the text.

10/22/22, 10:38 - Amelia: OMG miss ahahaha🤣😬
10/22/22, 10:39 - Amelia: *Gapapa miss saya jg ga ngerti yg penting lucu* 😢 *mungkin artinya happy new year hahahah* It's okay miss. I do not understand either, as long as it is funny 😢 it might mean happy new year hahahah

Amelia interpreted the face with the hand-over-mouth emoji as showing something funny politely since she used a rolling on-the-floor emoji with her lecturer. She thought that the text 'ahahaha' needed to be strengthened with an emoji since the emoji was available as a WhatsApp feature and commonly used in WhatsApp. Next, she also used a smiling face with tears emoji to show politeness.

6. Showing Gender Identity

Emojis could also be used in WhatsApp to show one's gender identity in the chats as the language contact zone. The sparkles emoji that was used by Morgan, who was the student, in the excerpt below was used to show her identity.

12/21/22, 12:31 - Miranda: Thank you
12/21/22, 12:33 - Morgan: 👍✨

Morgan used the sparkles emoji to show the positive vibes which were used by a female. Morgan stated that the sparkles represented feminism in WhatsApp chats.

Besides sparkles, there was also a flower emoji used by the student to show her identity in WhatsApp chats. Below is the

excerpt between Naura and Miranda, her lecturer. Naura did not complete the assignment on time and submitted her work late at that time.

> 12/7/22, 17:54 - Miranda: please do mind that the extension will not be given again
> 12/7/22, 18:01 - Naura: This message was deleted
> 12/7/22, 18:01 - Naura: OK miss, I will be more vigilant to anticipate so that I can still be on time and I try to prevent incidents like this from happening again. Thank you for the help. God bless u miss Miranda. I am very grateful for this. 🙏🌷😭

Naura stated that the flower emoji was used as an appreciation to someone older than her in the academic context. In addition, it showed some respect for a female person. Naura also thought that she could use the flower emoji since she is also a female student. The flower emoji would not be used if the chat were sent to a male lecturer since a flower represents a female identity nor if the sender were female. It must be noted that there were also two other emojis used in one sending chat. The folded hands emoji was used to say thank you to the lecturer while the loudly crying face emoji was used to show that she was sad. In that WhatsApp chat, those three emojis carried their meanings even though they were used together in one chat.

Discussion

The findings show that there are six different reasons why emojis are used by WhatsApp users in WhatsApp chats as the language contact zone. It was also possible that there are two reasons why an emoji was used. The second reason is usually related to the WhatsApp users' culture. As can be seen in the previous part, emojis can be used to substitute for the text. They can use all multimodalities available in one's language repertoire to deliver the meanings. It also proves that in Translingual Practice, one cannot separate between verbal and non-verbal language, such as emojis in the real use of them (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Garcia &

Sylvan, 2011). Another reason why the student uses the emoji is simply for accessories. There are written texts to deliver the meanings, but the students added emojis to strengthen the text. This reason for applying emojis in WhatsApp chats shows that language users are all resourceful (Pennycook, 2014). This creativity is also shown when the student applies emoji for the reason that it has similar meanings to the feelings, such as a regret feeling represented by a crying emoji. The next reason why emojis are used is that they can represent real facial expressions and gestures in online communication. This reason for using emojis has strengthened Santoso's research (2020) which stated that language repertoire plays an important role in translanguaging. It also shows that resourceful WhatsApp users have lessened the gap between the classification of native and non-native speakers and the gap between online and offline communication since multimodality, such as emojis, does not recognize it. It can be used and interpreted differently by non-native speakers who use English. Next, when emoji is used to show one's gender identity, it can be said that language users are creative. For example, the female student uses sparkles emojis to show feminism. The other example is when the student uses the flower emoji to show some feelings, such as showing respect to older people, while other people may use a flower to show beauty. This creative use of emojis shows that they can use to negotiate the meanings in translingual practice. The next reason why emojis are used is closely related to culture. This finding supports Adam's finding which stated that emojis can be enacted and function as a 'producer of culture'.

Last but not least, the evidence of the use of emojis shows that communication transcends individuals and words as evidence of translingual practice in online communication, such as WhatsApp (Canagarajah, 2013). The evidence of communication transcends individuals and words in online communication become stronger in online communication since there have been a lot of resources available, such as

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different types of emojis. The language users cannot differentiate the use of texts and emojis in the language contact zone, such as WhatsApp. All multimodalities are used together to negotiate the meanings, as Pennycook (2010) stated that language used is not fixed; it has become fluid depending on the context, the language, and the language users.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The results of this study show that emojis, as a part of one language repertoire, are used differently for several reasons by their users in different contexts. Those several reasons why the term language can be replaced by the term languaging since the meanings of the language have emerged from the contact zone, such as WhatsApp. The meanings are gained from not only the texts but also from the emojis available in WhatsApp. The blended use of emojis and texts in WhatsApp shows that in translingual practice, it is the language users who are very creative using all sources available in the language repertoire to deliver the meanings in the language contact zone.

As for the suggestions, the study of emojis can be conducted by delivering questionnaires to gain the data so that more participants can join the study and give more reasons which later can enrich the findings of the study of emojis. Another thing that can be conducted to enrich the results of the study regarding emojis is by widening the scope of the research to the uses of emojis in non-academic contexts since not all of the students are able to communicate with the lecturer in the private university where this study took place. The other way is that other participants from other backgrounds can also be invited to participate in a similar study to, again, enrich the interpretation of the use of emojis in different contexts.

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