LANGUAGE POTENTIALS OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: Community Development may cover various aspects of life, but in general it is intended to improve the mental, spiritual, and material welfare of the society. One of the aspects that needs developing is the cognitive maturity. People should develop rational, efficient, and polite behavior in order to establish social prosperity. All these can be achieved through the improvement of linguistic behavior. This paper attempts to explore some of the characteristic potentials of language competence which are relevant with the effort of developing community life. Communicative competence, which could be developed of the community, assumes the recognition of and compliance with social norms, honesty, efficiency, politeness, all of which are crucial parts of civilization reflected and manifested in terms of both linguistic and social behaviors. Therefore, one of the efforts of community development can be made through the improvement of communicative competence.

Key Terms: Community Development, Communicative Competence, language engineering

An Indonesian proverb says "*Bahasa menunjukkan bangsa*. (Language is a reflection of a nation)." Elaine Chaika (1982) wrote a book entitled "Language the Social Mirror." Wierzbicka, in her book "Semantics, Culture, and Cognition," describes the language as a mirror of culture and national character (1995: 372). Although with different connotations, it can be concluded that the previous three statements imply one point, namely the close relationship between language and society.

The form of the relationship between language and society depends on the point of view used in explaining the relationship. From a sociolinguistic point of view, for example, the form of language is constrained by various social variables, such as relations between communicants including power and solidarity, interlocutor identity such as social strata including age, gender, social background, economy, education, and communicative events. The emergence of various language variants, such as jargons, slangs, registers, dialects, language styles is an example of the manifestation of the influence of social factors on the forms of language.

From a psycholinguistic point of view, the meeting between language and society lies in the ethno-psychological aspect (Wierzbicka, 1995:29), namely the perspective and understanding of the community towards the life around them. In this connection Sapir and Whorf propose a hypothesis which states that one's perspective on nature, culture, and situations in their environment are reflected in the language they have. In other words, language determines or shapes perceptions of nature, culture, and social reality. Sapir as quoted by Steinberg et al. (2001:261) states, "Language is a guide to 'social reality'. Though language is not ordinarily thought of as an essential interest to the students of social science, it powerfully conditions all our thinking about social problems and processes. ... The fact of the matter is that the 'real world' is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language of the group."

Society uses more detailed signs (in the form of words) for the objects in their environment that are very important in their life. Bonvillain (2003:48) states "People name details when their survival depends directly on their environment." In Javanese, for example, there are various words related to rice, such as *pari*, *gabah*, *las*, *beras*, *menir*, *sega*, *bubur*, *upa*, and *karak*, but, for English people, who are relatively not much bound to rice, there is only one word for all of that, namely rice. That is because rice for Javanese is the main food and is a very important thing in their daily lives. As for the English, rice is not the main food. In Javanese, rice planted in rice fields is called *pari*. After being harvested and put in a plastic sack, it is called *gabah*. When the grain has been removed, it is called *beras*. However, when there is only one or two seeds in the middle of a pile of rice, it is called *las*. When the rice is pounded too small, it is called *menir*. After the rice is cooked, it becomes *sega*, but if it is over-cooked and too smooth, it becomes *bubur beras* (jam). When there is only one seed of rice stuck in the mouth because of the leftovers or falling on the table, it is called *upa*. And, when rice is dried under the sun and becomes dry, it is called *karak*.

On the other hand, the Inuit people (formerly called Eskimos) have various words related to snow. This is because snow is very important in their daily lives. While in Hawaii, there is only one word for snow, because for them snow is not so important in everyday life compared to that for Inuit people (Steinberg et al. 2001: 258).

All the above explanations prove that there is a close connection between language and people's lives. This paper further reveals the existence of this relationship by focusing on the potential of language associated with community development efforts.

Some Aspects in Community Development

Community development efforts basically aim to improve people's welfare materially, mentally, and spiritually. To achieve this goal, economic, health, education, political, legal, and religious aspects must be covered. Welfare is achieved if the community is able to accomplish various biological, psychological, personal, and social needs in their lives in a balanced manner. Needs for clothing, food, and shelter are examples of personal physical needs, while sexual needs are examples of social biological needs. The need for self-expression and achieving a goal are examples of personal psychological needs, while the need to love, be loved, and be respected are examples of social psychological needs.

Among the personal psychological needs are the need for knowledge and understanding, also called cognitive needs. Meeting these cognitive needs must be one of the priorities in community development efforts. Access to gain knowledge, the ability to understand various phenomena, and the rational capacity of the community must get a significant portion of community development efforts. Moreover, to achieve that goal, one way is through language engineering. This can be done because language has logical and rational characteristics.

People must naturally satisfy their social psychological needs, such as the need to communicate and interact with others. As a social being, a person cannot live a healthy and normal life without communication and interaction with other members of the community. For this reason, adequate communicative skills are required.

Communicative ability means the ability to convey ideas and feelings to other people either through oral or written media in a straightforward and effective manner. That is, the message conveyed by the speaker or writer (addressor) must be the same as the message captured by the listener or reader (addressee). If the messages conveyed by the addressor and that perceived by the addressee are divergent, it means there is a problem in the communicative

ability of the addressor and/or addressee. If that happens, unwanted impacts may appear. Regarding this, Confucius once said

"If language is not clear, what is said is not what is meant. If what is said is not what is done, what should be done remains undone. If what should be done remains undone, moral and art will deteriorate. If moral and art deteriorate, justice will go astray. If justice goes astray, people will stand helplessly in confusion" (Wahab 1989). The quote explicitly states that there is a close connection between language (more specifically communicative abilities) with behavior, morals, and justice. Therefore, one of the community development efforts must be made through an increase in communicative capabilities.

Language Potentials for Community Development

It has been explained previously that there is a close relationship between language and society, both in the sociolinguistic, ethno-psychological, and communicative competencies. The following section will describe in more detail the potentials of language that are relevant to community development, including the relationship of language and mind, language and culture, language and values.

Language and Mind

There are several theories that link language and mind. First, language is an essential tool for thinking. Second, language determines or shapes our perception of nature. Third, language determines or shapes our perspective (understanding) of the world (Steinberg et al. 2001: 246). According to the first theory, a person must have language skills, namely the ability of understanding and producing language, otherwise s/he will not be able to develop the mind. Among the figures who supported this view were Edward Sapir, Benjamin Whorf, and Vygotsky. Vygotsky said "Thought is not merely expressed in words; it comes into existence through them. ... The relationship between thought and word is in the form of a living process, viz. thought is born through words" (Steinberg et al. 2001: 252).

In the second view, supported by Sapir, Whorf, and Korzybsky (Steinberg et al. 2001) mastering a language, lexical and syntactic systems, will affect the way a person perceives the nature. Language provides the ability for humans to classify various objects that exist in their surrounding nature. The word chair, for example, is actually a classification of various forms and types of objects whose function is to sit on. There are kinds of rocking chairs, office chairs, chairs in the dining room, chairs in class, teacher chairs, student chairs, and bride-groom chairs. Likewise, other words are too, such as clothes, vehicles, houses, sitting, dancing, happiness, sadness, etc. Suppose that every object, movement, or condition is given a different name (label), then the language becomes infinite, and past experience is not relevant to the present and future. In summary, Young et al. stated that "language is a sense, a theory of the universe, a way of selecting and grouping experiences in a fairly consistent and predictable way" (1970: 27).

In the third theory, which is also supported by Sapir, Whorf, and Korzybsky, it is said that language influences a person's perception, outlook, or understanding of culture and the world. The use of the term democracy which means a communal structure without a class (no superior nor subordinate) can sometimes influence one's view of the concept of respect. In the name of democracy, for example, a child might behave less respectfully towards an older person. These questions might be asked in the context of Javanese culture, "Why should you bow if you walk in front of an older person, why should you kiss the older person's in shaking hands, aren't

we the same? Why should you speak using *kromo inggil* (the highest level of Javanese diaglossia), isn't it better to speak Indonesian, which is more egalitarian and democratic?

Another example is that in the early nineties, when Iraq entered Kuwait, the United States used the language, "Iraq invaded Kuwait" (which implies negative connotation) to justify its actions against Iraq. But, when the American army was in Iraq for a long time and regulating all government affairs there, (can it be said to be occupying Iraq?) the language used was "America is a peace keeper in the region" (which implies positive connotation). So, language is used as a tool to influence perceptions or perspectives on reality. In short, the existence of a close relationship between language and mind is a potential that can be used as a basis for community development efforts, namely through language engineering.

Language and Culture

Language is one of the manifestations of culture. With language people develop culture, and in line with the development of culture, language develops. There is an interdependent relationship between the two. With the creation of computers, for example, various new words related to computers emerged. Mouse is translated into *tikus* in Indonesian. However, in computer matters, the word *tikus* is not usable in communication using Indonesian. Hence, to buy a mouse, in a computer shop we cannot say "Mas, aku arep tuku tikus gae komputerku (Eng.: Guys, I want to buy tikus for my computer)." Instead, we must remain to say, "Mas, aku arep tuku mouse gae komputerku." So, the word mouse has undergone an expansion of meaning.

In language use, there are a number of rules that support the development of a more civilized culture. When conducting a conversation, for example, there is a rule that the speaker may not tell lies, and may not say something that is not true. Grice stating Maxim of quality says, "Do not say what you believe to be false. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence" (Grice 1975: 45). In communicating, interlocutors must also pay attention to the aspect of politeness, in the sense that communicating by sympathizing the feelings of others, i.e. using "the strategy of avoiding face threatening acts" (Brown & Levinson 1998: 493). The two rules of communication mentioned above will certainly have an impact on the creation of a harmonious, healthy, and civilized culture.

Language and society are mutually bound and we cannot possibly understand one without understanding the other. There is no single group of people that is not dependent on, formed by, or by itself forming a language (Chaika 1982: 1). Every social institution must be regulated by language. Law, religion, government, education, and family affairs, all are done using language. With language, we cultivate love, with language we also develop hatred, with language we manipulate other people, with language we are manipulated by others.

The sociolinguistic convention that links language with community factors indirectly implies that in language one must be conscious and obedient to the norms of language use in the community where the interaction is taking place. The elements of who speaks to whom when about what and how which are also called "features of context" (Hymes 1964) must always be taken into account when someone is communicating. Otherwise, it is very likely that there will be miscommunication or even communication failure.

Language and Value

Language is not just a system of sound symbols governed by structural rules (forms). The more essential is the meanings contained in them. The form and meaning of language is like

head and tail on a coin. Both are mutually bound and inseparable. Language has two main functions, namely intra-personal functions and inter-personal functions (Carroll 1964: 4). The first function means language as a tool for thinking and acting of a person, while the second means that the language is used to communicate with others. Related to this second function Brown and Yule (1983: 1) state that language has transactional and interactional functions.

Communication which is oriented towards conveyance and reception of a message, such as lecturing, writing books, asking directions to the police, interrogating thieves, interviewing clients, and advertisements are examples of using language with transactional functions. Meanwhile, communication which aims to create or maintain social relations, such as greeting someone when passing in front of his/her house, chatting while waiting for a bus at a bus stop or on a train with passengers who are new to know, and writing love letters are examples of using language for interactional functions.

Language form is neutral/value free. Its value appears when the form is used. The word 'dog', for example, is basically just a word that refers to a pet that likes to bark. However, when the word is spoken by someone who is irritated, with angry expression and strong intonation, to rebuke someone, "Anjing, Lu. (Eng. You're a dog!!)" then the utterance has a value of cursing. Another example is that when there is an economic crisis, many companies are declining production, and therefore, for efficiency, it is necessary to reduce the number of employees. In such a context, there can be two sentences: (1) "For efficiency, company X needs to fire some of its employees." (2) "For efficiency, company X needs to rationalize the number of employees." The meanings of those sentences (1) and (2) are the same but the value is different. The former has harder effect on the listeners than the latter. Strategies to mitigate expressions to reduce the psychological impact on listeners/readers, as in the example above, are called euphemism. When euphemism is used, the user actually has manipulated the other party.

Besides minimizing psychological impacts, language can also be used to maximize it. With passionate rhetoric and fiery agitation, for example, an orator or campaigner is able to arouse his audience' emotions and ignite their enthusiasm. By brandishing his grip and shouting *Allahu Akbar*! (Eng. God is Almighty), Bung Tomo (an Indonesian hero from Surabaya) succeeded in arousing the spirit of Surabayanese to fight against the invaders.

Final Remark

With the potential of language that is able to influence thoughts and beliefs, supports the creation of a polite and civilized culture, and is able to increase the intelligence and rationality of society, there are several things that need to be into account in efforts to develop community through language. First, developing society can mean an increase in cognitive quality and their rationality. One way to achieve this is through increasing their communicative competence. Second, to realize these competencies there must be an effort to improve the use of language that is proper and correct by the community. Proper means that the use of language is socially acceptable, whereas correct is grammatical in accordance with language rules.

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