Non-Observance of Maxims in Facebook Conversation

(A Case Study in English Education Department)

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ABSTRACT

This study was aimed at investigating types of maxims which are not observed by male and female Facebook users and how male and female users fail to observe a maxim in their conversation. This study involved 16 male and 15 female students majoring in English at one university in Bandung who have Facebook account. This study applied qualitative case study method. The data were in the form of conversations in Facebook that were downloaded from August until December 2012. The data were collected through several considerations of non-observance of maxims within the conversation based on Grice's theory of conversational implicature. The collected data are analyzed through several procedures of identifying, classifying, calculating, and interpreting. The findings showed that male users commonly failed to observe the *maxim of relation* by giving irrelevant contribution (53.13%), while female users commonly failed to observe the *maxim of quantity* by giving more information (44%). In addition, *flouting of maxim* is the most frequent non-observance of maxim that was performed by both male and female users in their conversation (96.88% & 92%). Thus, both users tended to make a joke, to stay close with friends, or just to contribute the conversation when they performed such non-observance of maxims.

Keywords: Non-observance of Maxims, Facebook, Conversation, Cooperative Principle, Implicature.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, social networking is one of the media of communication that is chosen by people. People believe that they can build an easy conversation with friends by using social networking as their medium of written conversation. Kelsey (2010) argues that social networking is the greatest part of communication in sharing stories and getting people's reaction. Thus, people tend to use social networking in order to retain social relationship with others.

There are several kinds of social networking that are used to communicate with others: Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, etc. Facebook, for instance, is a simple communication medium for keeping in touch, especially when people live far away. Research conducted by *eMarketer.com* on Facebook users in 2011 showed that Indonesia ranked the 2nd largest market with 35 million Facebook users (McNaughton, 2011).

Communication among social networking users commonly happens in informal situation. They tend to use informal language to deliver a message from explicit to implicit meaning (Yus, 1999). People imply another meaning from what they say and expect the hearer to know what they mean (Thomas, 1995). Thus, users have to understand what speaker says by interpreting what is said and what is implied.

On the other hand, the unexpected feedback can cause misunderstanding between speaker and hearer in conversation. Grice (1975) names this issue as implicature phenomenon. In identifying and classifying this phenomenon, Grice (1975: 45) proposes the cooperative principle as a rule of conversation. This principle consists of four maxims: (1) *maxim of quality*; (2) *maxim of quantity*; (3) *maxim of relation*; and (4) *maxim of manner* (Thomas, 1995).

Since the cooperative principle is set as the rules of conversation, it should be observed by social networking users in their interaction. However, users may be failed to observe maxims. Grice (1975, cited in Thomas, 1995) proposes five ways

people fail to observe a maxim, among others: *flouting a maxim, violating a maxim, infringing a maxim, opting out of a maxim*, and *suspending a maxim*.

Hals (2006) and Jara (2003) believe that users in chat room conversation have their conversational patterns and tend to imitate oral conversational environment in their written conversation when they fail to observe a maxim.

Therefore, the present study is conducted to explore some important issues by conducting the non-observance of maxims in Facebook conversation. This study investigates types of maxims that are not observed by male and female users and how they fail to observe the maxim in their interaction. Moreover, this study is expected to enrich a linguistic study, especially in pragmatic field.

GRICE'S CONVERSATIONAL MAXIMS

Regarding cooperative principle in conversation, Grice (1975) points out that people have to follow the principle by giving their required contribution in

the talk exchange. Furthermore, there are four conversational maxims that are proposed by Grice (1975) to develop the principle, among others: *Maxim of quantity*, *maxim of quality*, *maxim of relation*, and *maxim of manner*.

Maxim of quantity is pointed out as the amount of information given by the speaker to hearer. In line with this, Grice (1975 cited in Thomas, 1995) points out that people observe this maxim if they give a right amount of information that is required. *Maxim of quality* is concerned with the quality of information which is given by speaker to hearer. It means the speaker tries to give a contribution that is true and the speaker does not give a lack of evidence. In *maxim of relation*, the speakers are assumed to give a relevant contribution in communication exchange (Grice, 1975, cited in Thomas, 1995: 63). Meanwhile, in *maxim of manner*, the speakers are considered saying what they want to share clearly and deliver their message reasonably. Grice (1975) emphasizes that the speakers should

avoid obscurity of expression and ambiguity and also the speakers should be brief and be orderly in delivering their message.

NON-OBSERVANCE OF MAXIMS

On the other hand, people do not always mean from what they say literally when they build a conversation. In line with this, Thomas (1995: 57) believes that the additional or different meaning in conversation is a phenomenon of implicature. She adds that when a speaker implies something to suggest or to deliver some meaning by means of language, so intentionally s/he generates an implicature. Moreover, in generating an implicature, there are five ways people fail to observe a maxim, among others: *flouting a maxim, violating a maxim, infringing a maxim, opting out of a maxim, and suspending a maxim*.

Flouting a maxim takes place when a speaker blatantly fails to observe a maxim without any intention to mislead a hearer. Thomas (1995) believes that the speaker expects the hearer to look for a different meaning from what s/he says literally. In this case, speaker deliberately intends to generate an implicature. In *violating a maxim*, the speaker will be able to mislead the hearer intentionally. The speaker says the truth but implies what is untrue. In *opting out a maxim*, the speaker is unwilling to cooperate with the requirement of the maxims and it often takes place in public life. Opting out a maxim occurs when the speaker cannot reply in normal way that is expected. *Infringing a maxim* usually takes place when a speaker has an imperfect linguistic performance, cognitive impairment, or when a speaker cannot speak clearly or to the point because of informatively impaired. Infringing a maxim also occurs when the speaker possesses lack of knowledge to the topic. Meanwhile, *suspending a maxim* occurs when there are culture-specific or particular events that force the speaker not to say something directly, for instance, taboo words.

Furthermore, there is an occasion when people fail to observe a maxim, for instance, the use of language among social networking

users. They commonly communicate in informal situation. In line with this, Huang (2009) remarks that people generally use informal language as in spoken interaction as their writing style in email communication. In addition, people also give their personal opinions with follow-up such as justification or reiteration in persuading others. Biran et al. (2012) believe that written online conversation users participate the interaction in particular patterns such as in sharing new topics of conversation, giving more contribution than others, and making longer conversation threads on the same topic. Jara (2003) also adds that users in social networking tend to follow the pragmatic rules as they did in oral conversation. On the other hand, users tend to adapt chat room conversation as the new communication medium because they used written form of language, but they imitated oral conversational environment.

METHODOLOGY

This study is a qualitative case study that investigates types of maxims that are not observed by male and female Facebook users and how they fail to observe the maxims in their conversation.

The data were collected from the conversation of 16 male users and 15 female students majoring in English at one university in Bandung who have Facebook account. The conversations were downloaded from August 2012 until December 2012. The collected data were analyzed through several procedures of identifying, classifying, calculating, and interpreting based on Grice's theory of conversational maxims (1975).

TYPES OF MAXIMS THAT ARE NOT OBSERVED BY USERS IN SELECTED CONVERSATIONS
Based on the findings, types of maxim that are not observed by male users in their conversation are *maxim of quantity, maxim of relation, and maxim of manner*, while types of maxims that are not observed by female users are *maxim of quality,*

maxim of quantity, maxim of relation and maxim of manner. In addition, types of non-observance of maxims that are performed by male users are *flouting and opting out*, while types of non-observance of maxims that are performed by female users are *flouting*

and infringing. Generally, the distribution of non-observance of maxims is presented below.

Non-observance of maxims distribution based on types of maxims

Non-observance of maxims	Male					Female				
	QL	QN	RL	MN	Total	QL	QN	RL	MN	Total
Flouting	-	5	16	10	31 (96.88%)	-	11	8	4	23 (92%)
Violating	-	-	-	-	0(0%)	-	-	-	-	0 (0%)
Infringing	-	-	-	-	0 (0%)	2	-	-	-	2 (8%)
Opting out	-	-	1	-	1 (3.12%)	-	-	-	-	0 (0%)
Suspending	-	-	-	-	0 (0%)	-	-	-	-	0 (0%)
Total	0(0%)	5(15.62%)	17(53.13%)	10(31.25%)	32(100%)	2(8%)	11(44%)	8(32%)	4(16%)	25 (100%)

HOW USERS FAIL TO OBSERVE A MAXIM

The findings show that male users do not differ from female users in terms of the type of non-observance of maxims that they mostly perform. It is found that both male and female users mostly flouted the maxims (96.88% &

92%, respectively). Generally, table of the ways users flout a maxim is presented below.

The ways users flout a maxim by different genders

Maxims	Male	f	Female	f
Quality		-		-
Quantity	1. Giving less information	5	1. Giving more information	11
Relation	1. Interrupting the conversation	16	1. Giving irrelevant contribution	8
Manner	1. Giving an obscurity of expression	10	1. Repeating word more than once to clarify something	4
Total		31		23

Male users' contribution indicates that they want to make a joke when they flout a maxim in their interaction. The example of this type can be seen from this conversation:

A: Guys, I offer you my song entitled 'the fantasy world'. It is free to be downloaded

B: I have downloaded the song **since long time ago**

This example shows that B flouted the maxim of manner by giving the obscurity of expression. B gave the unclear statement by not mentioning the exact date when he downloaded the song because he just wanted to exaggerate the statement and made a joke.

Meanwhile, female users' contribution indicates that they want to maintain social relationship with other users when they flout a maxim in their interaction. The example of this type can be seen from this conversation:

A: What? Upload? I think it is download.

B: Hahaha yes, it is download. Sorry, my mistake. **It is different when you think and write in the same situation.**

This example shows that B flouted the maxim of quantity by giving more information than was required. B's contribution is considered to be a mitigation of the effect of the mistake that has been

made by her because she wanted to maintain social relationship with A.

Moreover, both male and female users have an intention to generate an implicature because they expect the hearers to look for other interpretation from what they say literally. On the other hand, there is a difference between male and female users in terms of types of maxims that are not observed by them. Based on the findings, male users' contribution indicate that they show no interest to the topic being discussed when they give irrelevant contribution and fail to observe the maxim of relation in conversation. Meanwhile, female users' contribution indicate that they want to stay close with friends when they give more information than is required and fail to observe the maxim of quantity in their interaction.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

There are 2 conclusions that can be drawn in this study. First, flouting a maxim is the most frequent non-observance of maxim that is found in Facebook conversation. It was shown that Facebook users tend to expect others to look for other interpretation when they imply something because they want to make a joke when they give irrelevant contribution and they want to stay close with friends when they give more information than is required. Second, users can perform such non-observance of maxims in their interaction because there is no limitation for the users to comment other users' post in their interaction. Thus, the use of non-observance of maxims in Facebook conversation can be created by male and female users by using different ways and reasons.

For further research related to this study, it would be better for the researchers to have more theoretical foundations on the topic in order to get a better result. Further research also can be conducted in other different contexts such as conversation in a formal situation. In addition, some other pragmatic issues are also available to be explored. Other researchers can investigate issue related the implicature in

communication situation by exploring politeness strategy, speech act, etc.

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