National Conference

Language in the

Online and Offline World

Petra Christian University, Surabaya
June 1 & 2, 2010

Editors:

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Proceedings
Language in the Online and Offline World

Editor
Dwi Setiawan
Liem Satya Limanta

Desain / Layout
Isty/Fendy

Cetakan Pertama Mei 2010

Penerbit dan Percetakan
PT Revka Petra Media
Jalan Pucang Anom Timur No. 5
Telp/ Fax : 031-5051711 / 5056848

Perpustakaan Nasional RI : Katalog Dalam Terbitan (KDT)

148 Halaman ; 148 x 210 mm

CHARACTERISTICS OF ADULTS AND TEENAGERS’ LANGUAGE IN FACEBOOK INTERACTION

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Introduction

Electronic media such as cell phone and computer have become an indispensable means of communication for the modern world. The communication using cell phone can be oral (direct telephone conversation) or written (text messaging). With computer the communication can be done only in writing.

One of the most popular means of cyber communication is through Facebook. Facebook is a global social networking website which allows its users to communicate with practically every person in the world. In the Facebook, users can add friends and send them messages, and update their personal profiles to notify friends about themselves.

Unlike text messaging in the cell phone which is limited by space and word counts, sending messages through Facebook is more comfortable. It is not limited by space or word counts, it is not limited by time (you can send and reply messages any time), it is not limited by topics and finally it is not intended to a specific person, so the audience is larger.

Facebook users can be regarded a speech community for two reasons. Bloomfield (1933) defines speech community as ‘a group of people who interact by means of speech. All human activities spring from close adjustments among individuals and the activities are based on language’. Secondly, Morgan (2001) says that speech community consists of speakers and listeners/readers who participate in interactions which are based on certain social and cultural norms and values that are regulated, represented and recreated through their discursive practices. Facebook can be considered as a cyber space that has the specific use and regulation and codes in the form of symbols, turn taking, language restrictions and topic focus. It is the rules of interaction that constitute the identity of a cyber communication.

As a speech community, it is assumes that Facebook users have specific styles in their language when interacting via Facebook. As far as the writer has concerned, there has never been any study regarding the linguistic styles of Facebook interaction. The present study will analyze the linguistic and non linguistic features of Facebook interaction. The data for this study is taken from two status writers and seventeen other respondents. These data will be analyzed basically from socio-cultural theory framework.

Social Dimension Scales

When a student was asked by his mother why he was late, he answered: ‘That bastard Sootbucket kept us in again’; but when the same question was asked by a teacher, he would answer : ‘Mr. Sutton kept us in, sir’. The different ways of saying the same thing reflect the student’s awareness of the social factors which influence the choice of appropriate ways of speaking in different social context.

According to Holmes (2008:9) linguistic choices are influenced by the following components:

1. The participants : who is speaking and who are they speaking to?
2. The setting or social context of the interaction: where are they speaking?
3. The topic : what is being talked about?
4. The function : why are they speaking.

Beside these components, there are also four different dimensions ;

1. The solidarity-social distance scale : which emphasize how well we know someone. This scale ranges from intimate to distant.
2. The status scale: the relevance of relative status in some linguistic choices. The scale ranges from superior to subordinate.
3. The formality scale: the influence of the social setting or type of interaction on language choice. The scale ranges from formal to informal.

4. The referential and affective function scales: language can convey objective information of a referential kind and it can also express how someone is feeling. These scales range from high information content to low information content and low affective content to high affective content.

**Language Style and Register**

A language variation chosen by a particular social group of people can be considered as a language style. Bell (1997) says that style derives its meaning from the association of linguistic features with particular social group. Denton (2001) mentions that language style is ‘a context sensitive interaction between speakers’ balance of innovative and conventional elements in their repertoire and hearers’ expectations’. She adds that language style has a polarized definition, on one end informal, vernacular, innovative, young, working class; while on the other end formal, standard, prestigious, conservative, young and middle class. Similarly, Holmes (2001) also asserts that the choice of style is based on the relationship between the speaker and her addressee in terms of relative status, solidarity, formality of the context and relative roles within that setting.

One of the language styles that relates to occupation is called register. Holmes (2008:259) defines register is the language of groups of people with common interest or jobs or the language used in situations associated with such groups. Agha (2001) also defines register as ‘a linguistic repertoire that is associated, culture internally, with particular social practices and with persons who engage in such practices. Some examples of register are: journalese, baby talk, legalese, the language of auctioneers, race-callers, sport commentator, airline pilots, criminals, financiers, politicians, language of the class room and language of the courtroom. According to these definition, language style used in Facebook interaction can also be considered as a register.

**Address Terms and Politeness**

A person is considered polite if he is speaking appropriately in light of their relationship with the addressee. Politeness means taking account of the feeling of others. To speak politely, according to Holmes (2001) we need to assess social relationship among the dimensions of social distance or solidarity and relative power or status and dimension of formality.

Politeness can be reflected in the use of address terms. When the boss suggests his subordinate to use first name (FN) to him this is a positive politeness strategy, expressing solidarity and minimising status difference. A subordinate should address his boss with title last name (TFN) to show their relative status difference. Solidarity scale also becomes a relevant factor in determining the choice of address terms. To a close friend or family member we can use first name (FN) but to people we don’t know well we can only use title (T) such as ‘Pak’, ‘Mbak’, ‘Bu’, etc.

**Speech Accommodation**

When people talk to each other, their speech often becomes more similar. Each person converges towards the speech of the person they are talking to. According to Howard (1997), the essence of accommodation theory is similarity attraction. It is a reflection of an individual desire for social approval. An individual can induce another to evaluate him more favorably by reducing dissimilarities between them. Holmes (2001) asserts that the purpose of accommodation is to please the others or putting them at ease or to meet their vested interest. For example, people accommodate to the language of the person selling goods in order to secure good will and hopefully a good bargain.

Speech accommodation can be done upward or downward. Upward convergence is done towards higher linguistic proficiency of addressee. For example from a student to his headmaster. On the other hand downward convergence is done towards the addressee with lower linguistic proficiency. For example a mother talking to her baby.
Sometimes, when the hearers imitate the speech of the speakers, it is not just the case of convergence. Labov (1972) uses the term ‘observer paradox’ to explain the phenomena in which the interviewee tends to be more formal when they are interviewed by interviewer who uses more formal speech. Goofman (1981) uses the term ‘footing’ for a similar case where participants tend to use similar structure with the speaker’s speech.

Research Methodology
The participants for this research are 19 persons. They are divided into two groups. The first group consists of one status writer and 8 commentators. The status writer is a 17 years old female university student and the commentators are all male university students ranging from 18 to 20 years old. The second group consists of one status writer and 9 commentators. The status writer is a 45 years old male university graduate manager of a company and the commentators are his subordinates, friends and relatives ranging from 25 to 50 years old.

The data are collected from the status written by those two persons in their facebook account and the comments given to their status.

The data collected will be explained in terms of linguistic factors and non linguistic factors. The linguistic factors include the word formation, choice of words, and grammatical construction including code switching. The non linguistic factors explain the relation between participants and the use of address terms with regards to politeness.

Results and Discussion
Interaction 1:

(1) **AH**, a 17 years old university student wrote on her status:

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I llfeel sm cowo
I llfeel with boy
'I have an ill-feel towards boy'
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As the status writer, AH can write any topic that she wants. She can write about her feeling, her activity and so forth. The topic that AH wrote that day was about her feeling. She uses a coined term ‘ill-feel’ which is popular among teenagers. ‘ill-feel’ means having bad feeling towards someone or something. She also uses the popular term ‘cowo’ which means boy. There is only one word abbreviated ‘sm’ which means ‘sama’ (with = towards). This sentence uses intra-sentential switching in which the structure is basically Indonesian ‘sebel sama cowo’. In Indonesian it is possible not to have a subject, but in English it is not possible.

(2) comment 1 from An, 19 years old university student living in Jakarta

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wah na..wa kan masih ngantri nih...hahahaha
wah na ..I still queue INT hahaha
'well na.. I am still queuing ... hahaha'
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This sentence begins with an interjextory remark ‘wah’ to show surprise. There are two intensifiers used in this sentence ‘kan’ and ‘nih’. The word ‘wa’ is an abbreviation of ‘gua’ or ‘I’ and the word ‘ngantri’ is an informal form of ‘mengantri’ in which the prefix ‘me’ is omitted. ‘hahahaha’ is an onomatopoeic word for the sound of laughter. An addresses AH as ‘na’ which is a clipping of her first name. This shows that the relation between An and AH is relatively close and they are having equal status.

(3) comment 2 from Ni, 20 years old university student living in Jakarta

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jadi lesbi dah ni anak...gawat...hahahaha
become lesbian INT this child....awful...hahaha
'this girl will surely become a lesbian... awful... hahaha'
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The second commentator also uses intensifier ‘dah’ and onomatopoeic word ‘hahaha’. He doesn’t use a specific address term; instead he refers to AH as ‘ni anak’. This also shows a close relation between AH and Ni because the term ‘ni anak’ is used for affective function.

(4) comment 3 from Ha, 20 years old university student living in Malaysia
huh…salah cowo paan coba?
‘huh….what mistakes do boys make, say it!’
Again, the sentence begins with an interjectory remark ‘huh’ showing a feeling of being annoyed or irritated. He uses the informal form of the word ‘apa’ → ‘apaan’ → ‘paan’. Suffix ‘an’ is only used in Betawi dialect to intensify the noun. So, basically ‘apa’ and ‘apaan’ mean the same, but ‘apaan’ seems more urgent. Another word ‘coba’ actually means ‘try’ but in this sentence, he wants to challenge AH to say something about the boy’s mistake. The use of ‘coba’ with that meaning only happens in informal conversation. In his writing, Ha doesn’t use a specific address term to AH but from the style, we can infer that he also assumes equal status to AH and they have close relationship.

(5) comment 4 from Ga, 19 years old university student living in Jakarta
bahaya jg ne ci Hana
dangerous also INT sis Hana
‘sis Hana is indeed dangerous’
The word ‘ne’ is the informal form of ‘nih’ which is used to intensify the sentence. He uses the abbreviated word ‘jg’ for ‘juga’. Ga uses TFN (title + first name) ‘ci Hana’ to address AH. ‘Ci’ is a Chinese term used to call a woman who is older than the speaker. From the use of address term, it seems that Ga has a lower status than AH, but in fact the word ‘ci’ is used as an endearment term not as a term of respect. So, we can still infer a close relation between AH and Ha.

(6) comment 5 from Al, 20 years old university student living in Jakarta
wew…what’s happen with male? Ad salah? Hahaha.
‘wew… what happens with boys? Do we make any mistake? Hahahaha’
Al begins his comment with an interjectory remark ‘wew’ showing a surprise. He writes his comment in English but then continues in Indonesian. He uses the abbreviation ‘ad’ for ‘ada’ and he ends his comment with an onomatopoeic word ‘hahaha’. Ending a sentence with a laughter sound indicates that the writer is joking or doesn’t expect the interlocutor to take it seriously. Thus, we can indicate that they too have a close relation.

(7) comment 6 from De, 18 years old university student living in Jakarta
wah2, jgn beralih suka ma sesama naaa… ga baee.. hahaha..
‘wah2, don’t turn like with similar naa.. not good.. hahaha..
‘wah2, don’t turn to like your own kind naa.. it’s not good….hahaha…
A similar pattern is shown by De in his comment. He begins with an interjectory remark ‘wah’ which is reduplicated with the number ‘2’ and ends with a laughter sound ‘hahaha’. He abbreviates the word ‘jangan’ into ‘jgn’; ‘sama’ into ‘ma’; ‘nggak’ into ‘ga’ and ‘baik’ into ‘bae’. In this utterance, he inserts an advice ‘ga baee’ meaning ‘it’s not good’. He also calls AH with a clipping of her first name ‘naa’. The use of FN and an advice implies the close relation between AH and De.

(8) comment 7 from Pe, 20 years old university student living in California
yee, cowok ama cewek itu saling membuthukan.
Yee, boy and girl that REC need
‘yee, boys and girls need each other’
Another interjectory remark ‘yee’ is used by Pe. Beside the use of ‘ama’ for ‘sama’, this sentence is rather formal.

(5) comment 8 from Pe, 20 years old university student living in California
hahaha, jangan ampe gak nikah lho hahaha....sedih banget kesannya, wkwkwk..
‘hahaha, don’t you dare not to marry hahaha... it sounds so miserable, hahaha.’
In his second comment, Pe turns to informal style. He uses three onomatopoeic words ‘hahaha’ and ‘wkwkwk’. He also abbreviated the word ‘sampai’ into ‘ampe’ and ‘nggak’ into ‘gak’. The word ‘nikah’ is the informal form of ‘menikah’ in which the suffix ‘me’ is omitted. The form ‘jangan sampai’ is used to convey a ‘mild threat’. His utterance again indicate that he and AH have a close relationship.

Teenager’s linguistic style in facebook interaction
1. Interjectory remarks. Five out of eight commentators above begin their comments with an interjectory remark. Usually an interjectory remark is used to express a feeling of surprise, annoyed and so forth. The words used have several forms such as : ‘wah’, ‘wew’, ‘yee’ and ‘huh’.
2. Onomatopoeic words. The most widely used onomatopoeic word used is the laughter sound ‘hahaha’. There is another laughter sound that is also popular nowadays, ‘wakakaka’ which is sometimes written as ‘wkwwkwwk’ or ‘wakakak’. The use of laughter sound word is to make the interaction livelier. Since the sound can’t be heard through the computer, therefore they create the word that can supply the need for intimate relation.
3. Intensifying word. There are a lot of intensifying words used such as ‘nih’, ‘lho’, ‘dah’ and ‘kan’ which are used to emphasize the message written.
4. Informal word forms. Beside their standard form, many words are written in their informal or non standard form. For example : ‘paan’ for ‘apa’ ; ‘ampe’ for ‘sampai’ ; ‘ngantri’ for ‘mengantri’ and ‘baee’ for ‘baik’.
5. Abbreviation. Basically, there are two kinds of abbreviated words. The first one is consonant abbreviation such as ‘jg’ for ‘juga’ and ‘jgn’ for ‘jangan’. The second one is the clipping such as ‘ma’ for ‘sama’ ‘wa’ for ‘gua’ and ‘ga’ for ‘nggak’.
6. First Name Address term. Since they are all university students, they assume equal status. Therefore, all of them call each other with their first names.

Interaction 2
(1) PI, male, 45 years old, marketing manager of a multi level company:
@ lounge—flight to Macau—Zhongsan with ATM
PI wrote his status at the airport when he was waiting for his flight to Macau. He used English in his status. The only different thing in his writing is the use of symbol @ to replace ‘at’. This is a common symbol in electronic language. His status invited many comments, mostly from his subordinates and his friends.
(2) Is, male, 30 years old, former subordinate of PI:
Congrats pak...jo lali rek...leh olehne cak..
‘Congratulation sir... don’t forget sir...’gift sir.’
Is begins by congratulating PI. He uses the clipping form of congratulation becomes ‘congrats’. Then he switches into Javanese and then to Madurese. These switches are meant as a signal of group membership and shared ethnicity with the addressee since PI is neither a Javanese nor a Madurese. Yet, these switches can be considered as an expression of solidarity, meaning they have a close relationship. Is uses the Title address term ‘Pak’ to PI to show that he has lower status than PI.
(3) Fr, female, 30 years old, distributor of MLM
Azyikk ya Pak... don’t forget us to bring ‘oleh-oleh’...Thankz before.
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‘It’s nice Sir……don’t forget to bring us ‘gifts’……thanks before’
Fr begins her comment with an interjection ‘azyikk’. Then she switches into English but still inserts Indonesian word ‘oleh-oleh’. She uses the address term ‘Pak’ which shows respect to the addressee. This is because PI has a higher status than Fr. The use of Title for the addressee and the switch to English show Fr’s attempt to converge upward to PI’s speech because PI also wrote in English. In her comment, Fr uses specific spellings for the word ‘asyik’ and ‘thanks’, she changes the ‘s’ into ‘z’ and she doubles the last consonant ‘k’, so the words become ‘azyikk’ and ‘thankz’. Actually, there is no change in meaning due to the spelling modification, it only gives more emphasis on the word. For example, if ‘asyik’ only means ‘nice’ than ‘azyikk’ probably means ‘extremely nice’.

(4) Yu, female, 25 years old, office staff
Take care sir
Yu only gives an advice to PI. She is using English in her comment, and she is using Title address term ‘sir’ to show respect to PI.

(5) Ju, male, 45 years old, high school friend
Have a nice trip bro..
Ju only states his wish for PI in English. He uses title address term ‘bro’ which is the clipping of the word ‘brother’. This means that he considers PI to be his brother and therefore they have equal status.

(6) Ig, male, 20 years old, nephew
Hati hati di jalan ya om, semoga selamat sampai tujuan dan kembali lagi ke Jakarta dgn selamat tanpa kurang sesuatu apapun! Sukses buat om!
‘Be careful uncle, hopefully you arrive there safely and return to Jakarta safely without any shortage whatsoever! Success for you uncle!’
As PI’s nephew, Ig writes his comment in very formal way. His writing is a kind of prayer for his uncle. He only uses one abbreviation for ‘jangan’ into ‘jgn’. He addresses PI with ‘om’ that is the title for ‘uncle’. From his writing, we can assume that he is trying to be polite and he converges upward to PI’s style, because regarding his age (20) Ig can be considered as teenager who presumably has different style.

(7) Ag, male, 30 years old, former subordinate
Ttdj bozz
Hati-hati di jalan bos
‘Be careful on the road boss’
Ag uses a popular acronym ‘ttdj’, which is actually the name of the famous Indonesian artist Titi DJ. ‘Ttdj’ should be pronounced in English as ‘ti-ti-di-je’ and this becomes the abbreviation of ‘hati hati di jalan’—be careful on the road. Ag also changes the spelling of ‘s’ into ‘z’ in the word ‘boss’ becomes ‘bozz’. The use of word play such as ‘ttdj’ is an indication that Ag is trying to be close to PI, but he still addresses PI as ‘boss’ to indicate that PI is his superior and has higher status than him.

(8) Ma, female, 50 years old, distributor
Have a nice trip bro.
Even though Ma is older than PI, in term of hierarchy in the company, PI has a higher status than Ma. Yet, Ma considers PI as her brother therefore she calls him ‘bro’ indicating a close relation and equal status between them.

(9) Ti, female, 45 years old, high school friend
Pram, Have a nice flight… good luck, GBU.
Ti addresses PI with his first name ‘Pram’. This shows that she assumes equal status with PI because they are old friends. Ti writes her comment in English. She only uses one popular acronym GBU which stands for God Bless You.

(10) Di, female, 30 years old, office staff
Kapan balik Pak.. ojo kalamaan..
‘When will you be back Sir.. don’t be too long.’
Das addresses Pi with title ‘Pak’, which indicates a respect toward the addressee. She begins her comment with a question and then she switches to Javanese. Again, this switch is not a signal of group membership since Pi is not Javanese but an indication of a close relation between them.

**Adult's linguistic style in facebook interaction**

1. **Address Terms.** The use of address terms depends on the relative status of the commentators to the addressee (Pi). Those who have lower status use only Title ‘sir’, ‘pak’, ‘om’, ‘bro’. Those who assume equal status use Title ‘bro’ and First Name ‘Pram’.
2. **Abbreviation.** A small number of abbreviation is found, usually only popular ones such as ‘ttdj, GBU. Clipping is found in the word ‘congrats’.
3. **Special spelling.** ‘S’ letter is changed into ‘z’ to give more emphasis on the words such as ‘azyikk, thankz, bozz’.
4. **Framing.** Since the writer wrote his status in English, most of the commentators also wrote their comments in English to equalize with the writer’s style. This can be considered as an upward convergence.
5. **Code switching.** There are cases of code-switching into English, Javanese and Madurese. The switching is not used as ethnic identity marker but to show close relation between the speaker and the addressee.

**Conclusion**

Facebook has been an important means of communication nowadays. Writing in Facebook is not limited by space or time. Facebook can also reach a bigger audience. The writing styles in Facebook differ according to the age, social background, educational background and the social dimension scales of the writers and the commentators. The differences include: the word forms, the vocabulary, the use of codes, the address terms and the grammatical construction. In a few years to come, Facebook will still be an interesting source for linguistic study since it is becoming more and more popular in uniting our global world.

**References**


