

**OVERCOMING THE PROBLEM OF COMMUNICATION:  
THE CLASSROOM REALITY**

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**ABSTRACT**

This article deals with a pragmatic research in the classroom reality. The study concerns with the problem of communication and the way the students bridge the gap between the literal meaning of an utterance and its actual intended meaning. To answer the problem, the research conducted was a type of a naturalistic classroom participant observation. It was a qualitative research in which the researcher was the key instrument in the data collection and analysis. The findings show that the students created and overcame the problem by embarking the intended meaning from the assumption that the participants in the classroom reality share the same common ground knowledge of the world experience and obey the principles of speaking.

**Key words:** problem of communication, speech act, presupposition, and speaking principle

**I. INTRODUCTION**

The classroom instruction must not only focus on the grammatical adequacy, but it must also account the live language. Otherwise, graduates only have a skill and competence on the secondary function of the language. In the daily routine, the use of language as the tool of the communication is unique (Wilkin, 1972). It is used to extend a certain meaning as well as to hide it. Consequently, it creates the traffic jam of the communication, which is called in this article as the problem of communication. This latter issue should be the primary interest of the school curriculum designers and the classroom teachers. It means that the pragmatic aspects of the language must be a part of the school curriculum. Accordingly, the problem to pose for such an area of study is how the participants of a communicative bridge the gap of communication. It means that schools must teach students to communicate in the natural setting. Theoretically, they must teach the pragmatic aspects as the context of the situation in which a natural communicative interaction is conducted. Accordingly, this article concerns with the problem of communication and the

way the students bridge the gap between the literal meanings of the utterances and the actual intended meaning they have made.

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Extending the other a direct meaning is a social problem in a communication. This causes people to have a tendency to hide a real intention through their speech. In fact, it creates a communication gap between the speaker and the listener. The gap is the difference between the literal meaning of an utterance and its speaker's intended meaning. The consequence is that the participants must overcome the problem in order to fulfill the purpose of the communication. In this article, the way the participants of a communication bridge the gap between the literal meaning and its intended meaning is termed as **the substitute plan**.

The theoretical concept of overcoming the problem of communication refers to the substitute plan. Austin (1962:1971) says that **speech act** is by saying an utterance, a speaker commonly does another thing such as, stating, interrogating, requesting, prohibiting, promising, etc (cf. Plat and Plat, 1975:6-7). Wunderlich (1972) says that a speaker can successfully do an action by using an utterance in a valid condition. According to Austin such a valid condition contains three aspects, they are the happiness condition, the sincerity condition, and the acceptance condition (in Plat and Plat, 1975:7). In addition to that, Cook (1989:35) says that a speaker can successfully conduct his intention in relation to a certain set of external conditions, i.e., the right person who speaks and two whom the intention is spoken, the right time and place it is spoken (Cook, 1989:35). Both Austin's and Guy Cook's condition concepts are the same in general. The difference is only on the terms they used. The terms happiness, sincerity, and acceptance are much philosophically oriented. They are rather abstract and more difficult to be hypothetically tested in overcoming the problem of communication. It theoretically sounds that the terms the right person who speaks and to whom it is spoken, at the right time and place it is spoken are much more realistic and sociologically oriented. The latter terms are potential to stipulate the communication situation and they are at ease to be hypothetically tested in overcoming the problem of communication.

Another way to bridge the gap between the literal meaning and its intended meaning is by using the **presupposition**, i.e., knowledge on when to speak and when not, what to say to whom and where, what to say in the beginning, in the middle and at the end of a communicative interaction. These refer to the terms of utterance pairs. According to Harvey sacks, "an utterance elicits another of specific kind, such as: greeting-greeting; question-answer; complain-excuse, apology, or denial; request; question-answer, complaint-excuse, apology, or denial; request/ command-acceptance-projection; compliment-acknowledgement; Farewell" (in Chaika, 1982:76). Accordingly, greeting can be intuitively classified into two, they are: formal and informal

greetings. Variations of formal greeting expressions are associated with time, they are: "Good morning" which is used in the morning; "Good Day" which is used at about lunchtime; "Good afternoon" which is used in the evening. They are usually used to people who are not close friends. Informal greeting expressions are "Hi" and "Hello". They are used to greet people who are known well or close friend.

Another way to bridge the gap is by subjective to the concept that a conversation as a communication must proceeds on a set of principles. According to (Grice, 1975) the speakers of a language produce and interpret language on the assumption that the sender obeys the **conversational principle** containing four maxims, i.e., the maxim of quality, the maxim of quantity, the maxim of relevance, and the maxim of manner. By obeying the maxim of quality, a speaker is assumed to be true as in what is said. A person is expected to be brief in a contribution to an interaction by obeying the maxim of quantity. Through the maxim of relevance, a person is required to give a related contribution to what is being talked, or to the previous utterance. For the clarity of a contribution a person is expected to speak clearly. According to Cook (1989: 29), using these four maxims, combined with the participants' presupposition—the general knowledge of the world, the listener can reason from the literal meaning of what is said to the pragmatic meaning—and induce what the speaker is intending to do with his or her words.

### III. THE RESEARCH METHOD

The type of this study is classified a naturalistic qualitative research (Badudu, 1988; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles and Huberman, 1984). The object of the study concerns with overcoming the problem of communication. *Specifically, the objects of the research are the way the subject extend a certain meaning as well as hide it, and bridge the communication gap affected by the hidden meaning.* The subjects are the students and a lecturer in a speaking classroom in FKIP Universitas HKBP Nommensen Pematangsiantar. The technique of the data collection is by conducting a naturalistic participant observation (Spraedly, 1980) in the classroom reality within three months i.e., since October up to December 2005. The technique is supported by "tape-recorded" to refer to typing the electronically recorded data into a word-processor' (Cf. Gimenez, 2001). The data are analyzed based on the orientation of the theoretical framework consisting of three components, they are: the **speech act theory**, the **presupposition theory**, and the **conversational principle theory**. The application of these components is treated as one unified and coherent approach to analyze the data.

#### IV. THE DATA ANALYSIS

##### The Belief Substitute Plan

<A>: Have you finished, yet?  
<B>: Not, yet.  
<A>: Ok

This conversation is between a teacher and a student. <B> is terminating doing a problem for some minutes before the conversation. The situation is potential for <A> to hypothesize the belief that <B> still remembers <A>'s instruction to do the problem by saying "Have you finished, yet?" With an intended meaning 'try to do the problem'. The hypothesis is effective. The intended meaning is transferred. The gap between the literal meaning of "Have you finished, yet?" can be bridged by the belief substitute plan of the **presupposition**. Further analysis on the interaction above is on <B>' response. By the situation, <B> hypothesizes the belief in which <A> knows that <B> still wants to continue the task. <B> tests the hypothesis by saying, "Not yet," to mean, "I will complete it". The intended meaning is also transferred. The literal and intended meaning of what is said is bridged by the belief substitute plan. The conversation is closed by an agreement expression, i.e. "Ok" in the same hypothesis testing.

##### Attitude Substitute Plan

<A>: I have lost my wallet  
I have no money left in pocket  
<B>: I am sorry to hear about it  
<A>: Thank you.

In the conversation above, <A> and <B> are closed friends. <A> is telling <B> bad news happening to <A>. The situation exposes <B> to hypothesize that he needs to show his social attitude of the **speaking principles** to wards <A>. <B> tests his hypothesis by saying "I am sorry to hear about it" to mean 'extending peer solidarity'. In the conversation, the literal meaning of "I am sorry to hear about is " is only basic. It is really beyond extending peer solidarity. The hypothesis test discussed in the conversation above is effective. It is shown by the response, "Thank you" as granting to extending the peer solidarity.

##### The Role Substitute Plan

<A>: It gets warmer in this room  
<B>: Let me turn on the fan, sir!  
<A>: Thanks

The conversation above happens in an office. <A> is the boss, and <B> is a worker. The nature of the situation exposes <A> to hypothesize the way which is based on the role functions of the speech act and <B> is making the request to turn on the fan. The hypothesis is tested by saying, "it gets warmer in this room" to mean please turn on the fan, please. The hypothesis works if transferring the meaning is effective in gathering the response, "Let's turn off the fan the fan, Sir"

#### **The Right Person Substitute Plan**

<A>: You are too tired. You only need a vacation  
<B>: Thank you, sir.

The conversation above, <A> is the manager of a company, and <B> is a lower manager. <B> is to do his task before and up to the time of the conversation. <A> is rather disappointed and hypothesizes himself the right person to have to authority giving <B> a holiday to mean a 'disappointed' on the work of <B>. <A> tests his hypothesis by saying, "you are too tired, you only need a vacation". The hypothesis works, since <B> can see that the hypothesis is valid. He accepts it 'it is true, and I am ready to do what you intend me to do.'

#### **The Right Time Substitute Plan**

<A>: Well, I've got to be at the office at 2 good byes!  
<B>: Yes, Good-bye.

In the conversation above, <A> and <B> are old friends who have just finished having lunch in a restaurant. They have talked very much, and it is almost 2 o'clock. The nature of the situation exposes <A> to hypothesize that the lunch meeting can be dismissed at that time to continue another daily routine. He tests the hypothesis by saying, "Well, I've got to be at the office at 2 i.e., at the end of the lunch meeting about some times before the office is open. The meaning communicated is 'Let's dismiss, and I'll return to my office'. The transfer of meaning is effectively.

#### **The Right Place Substitute Plan**

<A>: Well. This is more than I want to spend!  
<B>: How about \$ 10  
<B>: Ok. I'll take it

In the conversation <A> is a customer and <B> is a shop assistant. The situation is the last part of their conversation, which exactly happens at the shop rack where the commodity bargained, is placed. The nature of the situation, i.e., the place of the conversation exposes <A> to hypothesize that he could bargain the

commodity. He test the hypothesis by saying, "Well, this is more than I want to spend" with its literal meaning. The hypothesis works because it is tested at the right place, i.e., at the shop rack where the commodity being bargained is placed, but is not at the other place. It can transfer meaning effectively.

#### **Question – Answer Utterance Pairs**

##### **Yes-No Question**

<A>: Do you live here?  
<B>: Yes, I do

In the conversation above, the nature of the situation exposes <A> to hypothesize that he could limit his question to Yes-No answer. He tested the hypothesis by saying, "Do you live here?" The hypothesis works because it transfers the intended meaning effectively.

##### **Why – Question**

<A>: What does your father like?  
<B>: Well. He is very kind  
He loves talking to all my friends.

<A> and <B> are intimate friends. The nature of the situation exposes <A> to hypothesize that he can interrogate some complete answer of information by using a Wh-question. He tested the hypothesis by saying, "What does your father like?" The hypothesis works, because it transferred meaning effective.

#### **Complaint – Excuse, apology, or Denial Utterance Pairs**

Interactions in some situations may happen to contain complaints-excuses, apologies or denials. An accidentally unsatisfied verbal or nonverbal behavior in such situations is reacted to conform to the rules of the social interaction. People are aware of saying excuses and apologies when they are expose to their lack of social interaction rules. The way to exposes is by saying complaint to the people who make the unsatisfied verbal or nonverbal behavior. The complain requires an excuse or apology or denial. Followings are some examples of illustrations to explain the concept of The Complaint-Excuse, Apology or Denial Utterance Pair as a substitute plan of the appropriateness strategy of communication.

##### **Complaint – Apology**

<A>: This is my pen  
You took it yesterday from my desk  
<B>: I am sorry. I forgot to return it to you

<A>: Ok. Then.

<A> and <B> are schoolmates. The situation exposes <A> to hypothesize that he needs to complain to make <B> becomes aware of his lack and say apology to <A>. The hypothesis is then tested by saying, "This is my pen". You took it yesterday from my desk". The hypothesis works, because <B> apologized by saying, "I am sorry. I forgot to return it to you". The hypothesis works and it transfers meanings.

#### **Complain – Denial**

<A>: That is my umbrella

<B>: No. This nine. Yours is Yellowish. This is Yellow

The situation exposes <A> to hypothesize that his complain requires an apology or a denial. In this situation the hypothesis made ended with a denial

#### **Request/Command – Acceptance or Rejection Utterance Pairs**

Asking people to do something is expressed in the form of requests and commands. The language users hypothesize the request and commands to be facilitated with acceptances or rejections. Request is asking people to do something in a less direct way, while command is a more direct way. The followings are some illustrations of the request/command. Acceptance or Rejection Utterance pair as substitute plans of the appropriateness strategy of communication.

#### **Request-Acceptance**

<A>: Would you be able to post this letter afternoon?

<B>: Yes. I am going to the post office this afternoon.

In the conversation above, <A> end <B> are close friend living in the same apartment. The situation exposes <A> to hypothesize that asking people to do some thing could be done by using request, and also to hypothesize and acceptance or rejection response for the request. He tests his hypothesis in which he request for the request. He tests his hypothesis in which he request <B> to post a letter by saying, "Would you able to post this letter this afternoon?" The hypothesis works for <B> accepts to do something for <A>, i.e., to post the letter this afternoon. The hypothesis transfer meaning of request-acceptance or rejection utterance pairs

### Compliment – Acknowledgement Utterance Pairs

Praising is human and is common among the society. The language users are aware of giving comment on the situation of the world they are facing. They hypothesize positive compliment on positive situation. They also hypothesize acknowledgment as the response, i.e., the utterance pair of the compliment. This acknowledgement functions to signal agreement on the complement. Following is an utterance pair as a substitute of the appropriateness strategy of communication.

#### Complimenting the appearance of a friend

<A>: You look very beautiful to day  
<B>: Thank you. I went to a salon this morning.

In the conversation above, <A> and <B> are close friends. <B> has just got the latest style of haircut of <B>. The hypothesis works, because its utterance pairs, i.e., the acknowledgement, respond the compliment.

#### Farewell – Farewell Utterances Pairs

In English for instance, saying farewell, i.e., departing could be divided into informal and formal ways. Informal farewell expressions are like Goodbye, so long until we meet again, farewell, etc. Informal farewell expressions are used among close friends, but formal expressions are used to other people. Followings are illustrations to explain the concept of farewell – Farewell utterance pairs as substitute plain of the appropriateness strategy of communication.

#### Informal Farewell

<A>: You see. I've got to see mum at 4.00 Bye-bye  
<B>: Ok. Bye-bye, too

In the conversation above, <A> and <B> are close friends, and they talked for some hours, and they are going to depart each other. The situation exposes <A> to hypothesize that he would say, "Bye-bye" to depart. The hypothesis works, because it transferred meanings, and it is responded by the same farewell expressions.

#### Formal Farewell

<A>: It was nice conversation. I am going to leave now and good-bye Mr. Johnson.  
<B>: Yes, Good-bye, Mr. Weils.



In the conversation above, <A> and <B> are colleagues talking in an office canteen. They are going to depart. The nature of the situation exposes <A> to hypothesize that they would say. "Good bye ... " to depart. The hypothesis works, because the hypothesis transfer meanings, and it is responded by the same farewell expression.

## V. CONCLUSION

Hiding an intention in a communication creates the problem of communication. The conversationalists apply their knowledge on the pragmatic aspects to overcome the problem. Those aspects are the speech act, the presupposition, and the conversational principles. Formal classroom students create the communication problem by avoiding speaking in a transparent way. This way affects them to hide their real intended meaning through the literal meaning of their utterance. They can be successful to fulfill their purpose by using a strategy of communication that is termed as the substitute plan. In their strategy they apply the pragmatic aspects, they are: the speech act, the presupposition, and the conversational principles. The pragmatic aspect selection in their strategy varies according to the nature of the situation of the communication.

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