

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The use of instant messaging applications has increased significantly in recent years. Now people can “chat” in mobile phones, no longer limited by the number of the texts they send, as if people converse in real world. The advanced technology has also enabled people to share not only text, but also pictures, videos, contacts, and even locations without a high price. Instant messaging applications, such as WhatsApp, were indeed created to replace the conventional SMS system (Bouhnik & Dshen, 2014). Facilitating the users with lots of features, WhatsApp has captured mobile users’ convenience that it now becomes one of the most popular instant messaging applications. As a proof, it has been claimed that “In the past few years, a new breed of instant messaging apps, such as ... WhatsApp, and many others, have rapidly been gaining popularity among users...” (Hook & Faklaris, 2016, p. 65).

As an active user of WhatsApp, the writer also feels convenient and comfortable using WhatsApp to communicate. While using WhatsApp, the writer spotted interesting things which depict people’s creativity. WhatsApp users often share and exchange pictures, but these are not only ordinary pictures. This is a type of pictures which contain slangs in it, called meme. Meme is defined as “... an image with words

superimposed and is quickly becoming a popular form of social media” (Akines, 2015, p. 5). Paul Gil in Akines also described meme as “virally-transmitted cultural symbol or social idea” (2015, p. 5). It basically combines words and pictures, making the readers hooked up at both components.

The creativity of meme lies not only on the text and picture combination, but also on how people share the meme over a particular up-to-date popular event. Somehow, it has also become a way for people to express their feelings, speak up their opinions, tell their jokes, and etc.



Figure 1.1: Meme about 212 demonstration

The above sample of memes shows how memes are creative and timely as it is shared after the event got viral. 212 was a nickname of a mass demonstration, attended mostly by Moslem, which protests what is considered as religion blasphemy in Indonesia. During the time, both before and after it, a lot of memes were created and shared. The shared post of 212 incident tells the readers two interesting messages about the 212 phenomenon and the political situation in Indonesia through both the text and graphics. From the graphic, it can be seen that the number “1” of

212 is replaced by a figure of man wearing a head cap and holding an umbrella. This is very interesting because it is actually the figure of Jokowi, the president of Indonesia. 212 was claimed to be an action to defend a particular religion in Indonesia in which they also prayed together. In that rainy moment, Jokowi was praised over his gentle action for not hiding from the demonstration. Instead, he came down to the road, got into the demonstrating mass with a head cap and white “koko” shirt, a typical Islamic attire.

The text also has gotten another message to share. It says “The brave president takes over the ‘singing’ president.” People might not get it at once, but as the meme gets more widespread, the message also does. The “brave president” phrase refers to Jokowi, as explained above. The “singing president” phrase refers to the previous president of Indonesia, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY). Most Indonesians have already known that SBY is fond of singing, he once even had a group band and has been gossiped that he is planning to create an album lately. Moreover, Jokowi and SBY have been always compared in recent times when political situation in Indonesia keeps getting “hotter”. This meme praises Jokowi over SBY as it implicitly says that the current president has gotten more nerves than the previous president.

It is also very interesting to see how the image and text in the picture work simultaneously that they create a very clear, strong, and specific message when read. The image without the text would not create

such a complete message and vice versa. “212” image, without the text, would not be easily understood. Though some might understand, it might only be perceived as a note expressing that 212 is an important event. It will work just in the exact way if the text is read without the image. People would wonder, why the president is called brave, and how exactly one is over the other.

In other words, memes contain not only a single meaning of the text or the image, but also a meaning created by the combination of the text and the image. While traditional communication used merely gesture (visual) or words (verbal), modern communication now combines those two components to hook more attention.

A study on memes has been done by Akines (2015) in which she figured out the Hispanic representations. She focused her research to search the stereotypes and perspectives of Hispanic on memes, YouTube, television, and film. Akines chose relative but popular memes in her study in which she claimed that memes undoubtedly contribute to the stereotypes of Hispanic in United States, regarding its discourse and history of segregations. Some studies on slang focus on slang in a particular area and the meanings, for example the study done by Bembe & Beukes (2007) entitled “The Use of Slang by Black Youth in Gauteng”. They focus their study on the slang lexical items and phrases chosen by the users, black youth who use English as their additional language. They then analyze the lexical creativity and innovation. They also analyse the functions of the

slangs performed by the black youth in Gauteng. However, no study was done to analyze deeply the contributions of slang in the form of memes, particularly online, to language.

Memes shared via WhatsApp are very interesting to analyze as they are very vogue in the society. Its creative combination has somehow made it very appealing. In this study, the writer aims to figure out the contribution of online slangs – in the form of memes - to language, Indonesian in particular. The writer would collect some memes shared in WhatsApp and analyze on how the slangs are formed and what their creative contributions to language are.

1.2. FIELD OF THE STUDY

This study belongs to linguistic field. In particular, it is a part of Sociolinguistics.

1.3. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The scope of this study is language varieties. Language varieties are divided into two groups, formal and informal. This study focuses on analyzing part of the informal language variety, online slangs, in form of memes that are shared among WhatsApp users. The writer analyzes the data found in accordance with the Sociolinguistics, slang, and morphology theories which have been chosen.

1.4. PROBLEM FORMULATION

The writer formulates the problems as following:

1. What kinds of slangs exist in the forms of memes and how are they formed?
2. What are the contributions of online slangs to language?

1.5. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study are:

1. To find out the kinds of slangs in the memes shared in WhatsApp and how they are formed.
2. To explore the contributions of online slangs to language.

1.6. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study, which focuses on online slangs in the form of memes, is hoped to give positive contributions towards the development of research in Sociolinguistics field. Hopefully, it would contribute much to enlighten people on online slang's contribution to language.

1.7. DEFINITION OF TERMS

1. Meme: image with words superimposed and is quickly becoming a popular form of social media (Akines, 2015, p. 5)

2. Multimodality: a form of communication which uses more than one modes (example: text and image) (Kress, 2000)
3. Slang: a wide variety of different types of language (Coleman, 2012, p. 12)
4. WhatsApp: Smartphone application for instant messaging (Bouhnik & Dshen, 2014, p. 217)

