



Misunderstanding and Offense in the Digital World as Impacts of Community Low Level of Language Literacy and Communication Skills

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Abstract

Communication is part of social interaction that acts as a means of exchanging information, meeting individual needs and development. However, such social interaction activities may fail and create interaction problems, including misunderstanding and offense. Misunderstanding occurs when the listener thinks he or she has understood or misinterpreted what the speaker meant while offense occurs when the listener is unable to accept, is annoyed and disturbed by what the speaker is saying. Since entering the digital era which began about 10 years ago, misunderstandings and offenses have become increasingly common. The rapid flow of information exchange where everyone is almost free to speak and respond to speech makes these two issues even more unstoppable. Responding to these, as the main concern of this paper, the author invites the readers to discuss about misunderstanding and offense as results of individual low level of literacy and communication skills.

Keywords: *Misunderstanding and Offense; Communication; Language Literacy.*

INTRODUCTION

One of the problems faced by most people is social interaction especially in the surrounding environment. In carrying out the function of social interaction, individuals communicate with other individuals either directly or indirectly. Direct interactions can be demonstrated by conducting discussions between individuals and within groups. Meanwhile, indirect interactions that are carried out with intermediary tools such as telephones, cellphones, and so on because of the distance between the speaker and the other person (Goody, 2009).

Individuals certainly have a need to communicate and a desire to have many relationships, but sometimes building relationships with other people is not easy. Thus, individuals need an ability and skill to do this to others. Those abilities and skills are good communication with other individuals. Humans relate to each other because they need each other and also because in that relationship communication occurs and it is through communication that humans can develop, the ability to understand other people's points of view is very important so that we can communicate effectively.

In the digital world, individuals communicate to others indirectly, but through an intermediary cell phone screen or similar gadget. The communication carried out is also divided into two categories of activities, namely speaking-listening (oration) and writing-reading (literacy). Both of these activities have the same concept, of course, in which there are those who convey information by speaking directly or in writing and those who receive information by listening or reading. Therefore, the main concern of this conceptual writing is to highlight the misunderstanding and offense as an impact of low level language literacy and communication skill

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Literacy is the process of reading, writing, speaking, listening, seeing and expressing opinions (Mace, 1992). Literacy is generally defined as the ability to read and write and use spoken language. According to UNESCO "The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization", literacy is a set of real skills; especially skills in reading and writing that are independent of the context in which these skills are acquired and who acquires them.

There are at least six literacy skills that a person must master, namely: literacy, numeracy, science, digital, financial, and culture and citizenship. Of the six types of literacy, according to the Minister of Education and Culture, reading and writing are the earliest known types of literacy by humans. This is because reading and writing are functional literacy. A person is said to have literacy skills if he understands something based on his reading comprehension (Thanuskodi, 2019). The ability to understand reading is a process that requires the reader to be able to understand the written word group as a unit. The ability of students who have understanding in reading comprehension is one of the important factors for the success of learning materials.

The ability to understand something can be measured by the ability to write. Writing ability is the ability to express ideas or ideas into an essay. In assembling beautiful sentences, language skills are needed. Language skills are divided into four, namely listening/listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Writing skill is one of the four aspects of language skills in learning. Writing skills are always considered because it is very important for students to practice skills in providing ideas in each of their writings, as expressed by Oliviera & Motta (2002) writing is expressing ideas in thoughts and feelings through language.

Literacy has a broad meaning, such as the ability to understand information, the ability to communicate, or the ability to read and write. Literacy also means the depth of one's knowledge of a subject of science. The issue of literacy is still something that must be addressed in Indonesia. Based on a survey conducted by the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) released by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and

Development (OECD) in 2021, Indonesia ranks 62 out of 70 countries, which means that it is 10 bottom-placed countries that have low literacy levels.

Communication Skills

As social beings, humans will not be able to avoid contact with other people. Like it or not, relationships with other people will always be established. Communication plays an important role when a person relates to each other. According to Kuhnke (2013), Communication is the process of people sharing thoughts, ideas, and feelings with each other in commonly understandable ways, according to Castells (2013) communication is the delivery and understanding of messages from one person to another, while according to Kumar & Lata (2015), communication is a dynamic process in which people seek to share their internal problems with others through the use of symbols.

Based on the opinion above, it can be concluded that the notion of communication is the ability to convey messages or information about the mind which includes the ability to speak, write, draw and discuss. According to Carnegie (2017), the indicators of communication skills are as follows: 1) Ability to answer questions 2) Communicating ideas with symbols or tables 3) Ability to work together in groups

Communication is the most important capital for people in living the life. Good communication will give birth to a good social environment as well. People can convey messages clearly, provide feedback, and help create positive relationships with others. Many of the problems that occur in an organization are the direct result of people failing to communicate. It leads to confusion and can cause a good plan to fail. Communication is the exchange and flow of information and ideas from one person to another. It involves a sender transmitting an idea to a receiver. Effective communication occurs only if the receiver understands the exact information or idea that the sender intended to transmit (Shea, 1994).

Therefore, a good way of communicating must be understood by everyone. The benefits of having communication skills cannot be underestimated. With communication, people can provide emotional support to others who are experiencing depression or anxiety. In addition, communication allows them to express how they feel about their feelings or the conditions in the environment around them.

Misunderstanding and Offense

In communicating, people choose the right words to convey the intent and purpose. In other words, actually, they depend on the meaning of the word. If diction is not able to

represent one's feelings or thoughts, the message may fail to convey. It is not impossible, misunderstandings lead to protracted debate, offense or even triggers conflict (Glass, 1999).

According to Indoensian Dictionary, the meaning of 'misunderstanding' is having incorrect understanding of the speech, statements, attitudes of others (usually causing a reaction for the person concerned), while the meaning of 'offense' is feeling touched by someone's words or actions. Offense can enter into the type of figure of speech so that the use of offense can not be in the true sense. Offense has a meaning in the class of verbs so that it can express an action, existence, experience, or other dynamic sense.

It is normal to feel offended by the harsh words and actions of others. However, people who have a very sensitive nature usually are easily irritated. They will be very easily offended by small things that are considered normal by others (Evans, 2010).

Misunderstanding and offense are very common phenomena in today's era, where the flow of information is very swift which allows people to disseminate information and opinions face-to-face or digital media and other people feel free and competent enough to respond to what has been informed to other people spread in public domain (Young, 2021).

How Misunderstanding and Offense Occur?

The process of interpersonal communication deals with the components of interpersonal communication involved and the goals which are weaved one to another. Theoretically, the process of interpersonal communication may vary – resulting in different models regarding what and who are involved and how they relate one another in the context of time and place of the event and why (Duck, 2007). In practice, the process of interpersonal communication should reveal the major components involved; show how those major components relate one another with reasonable given details of each component. How the conceptual process of interpersonal communication put into practice in different events will refer to which sub-components of each component are given more emphasis by the communicators and the purpose they want to achieve.

Studying the communication process is important in order to avoid misunderstanding and offending. There is a chain of understanding that integrates the members of conversation (speaker-listener) from top to bottom, bottom to top, and side to side. Then, how communication process occurs, even lead to misunderstanding and offense? 1) Information exists in the mind of the speaker to be sent. This can be a concept, idea, information, or feelings. 2) A message is sent to a listener in words or other symbols. In this stage, how the speaker put content and context into account will affect on how the listener convey the message. Content is the actual words or symbols of the message, which is known as language - spoken and written words combined into phrases that, make grammatical and

semantic sense. Context is the way the message is delivered and is known as Paralanguage such as tone of voice, the look in the sender's eye's, body language, hand gestures, state of emotion (anger, fear, uncertainty, confidence, etc.) These two are mixed and blended into a 'message'. 3) After getting the message, the listener translates it into a concept or information based on, for instance, knowledge, perspective, and mindset he possesses. Aside from that, the person speaking, time, place, situation and condition do play their part in the process of translating the message in which all of these are known as conversation factors.

Unfortunately, the above process does not always go well. This is because, according to Brounstein (2011), mutual understanding will only occur if the content and context in the message conveyed by the speaker is in accordance with the conversational factors owned by the listener. Related to content, people use and interpret the meanings of words differently, so even simple messages can be misunderstood. In addition, many words have different meanings to confuse the issue even more. While in context, paralanguage causes messages to be misunderstood as people believe more in what people hear the accuracy of nonverbal behaviors is trusted more than verbal behaviors.

Many people think that what the speakers convey will be immediately be understood by the listeners whereas the speaker must always pay attention to the content and context of what he wants to convey. A famous American icon in the 1950s, John Wayne, said "I'm only responsible for what I say, not for what you understand". This is intended to at least prevent misunderstandings and offenses caused by the speaker due to lack of interpersonal communication skills, although indeed, as mentioned above, the listener needs to have a strong conversational factor base for misunderstanding to occur.

Misunderstanding and Offense: Cause - Effect

Basically, the cause of misunderstanding in relationships is that each individual can have a different reality. Everyone's reality is said to be subjective because everyone has a different point of view based on experience, culture, embedded values, and so forth. In addition, the habit of talking more than listening is usually the cause. Many people start making rebuttals without actually hearing what the others are saying. Sometimes, people jump to conclusions just by hearing a few or two pieces of information from the other person, without realizing that what that person meant was different. This is the reason why misunderstandings often occur in an interaction (House, Kasper & Ross; 2016).

Someone who feel offended can be caused by the very sensitive personality they have. It can be defined as an acute physical, mental, and emotional response to internal (from

within) or external (environmental and social) stimuli. In addition, people being irritable or angry can also be caused by mental health disorders, such as 1) Bipolar disorder, which is a mental disorder that makes sufferers experience two extreme mood swings, namely the mania phase and the depression phase. 2) Borderline personality disorder (BPD) is a disorder that affects the mood, behavior, and self-image of the sufferer. People with these personalities disorder may experience strong emotions, poor self-image, and impulsive behavior. They also usually have unstable personal relationships (Chapman, 2007).

Offense may also be a symptom of other mental disorders, such as anxiety disorders, depression, schizophrenia, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and so on. In addition, hormonal imbalances can also affect this feeling. To confirm that irritability is caused by a mental health disorder, one will need to undergo an examination by a psychologist or psychiatrist.

Misunderstanding and offense are actually the result of ineffective communication and inadequate literacy skills. In receiving information, or what is commonly called receptive skills, humans are given two senses, namely Sight (to read) and Hear (to hear). The lack of understanding ability in reading or listening activities makes people easily misunderstood; it is when they feel they already know the message they have received and then make their own conclusions and are easily offended by someone's saying or behaviour in which one may feel it irritating (Jucker, 2006).

Misunderstanding and Offense: Social Phenomena

Monitoring the flow of information on the internet, there will be found many cases of misunderstanding and offense, whether it's because of the direct or indirect speech. Cases of misunderstanding that led to beatings to the point of taking people lives became news that adorned online news portals. The lowest level of all these is, probably, bullying behavior towards the speaker/writer. This kind of social sanction is directly given by the community (as recipients of information) without any effort to find out more about what the speaker meant.

Speeches from ordinary people or those who are considered to have influence such as artists, celebrities, celebgrams or youtubers, even officials (the government) do have huge chances in becoming victims of misunderstanding and offense. According to Taylor (1992), misunderstanding and offense can occur to any individual regardless of background, because the factors that play a role in eliminating these two things are communication skills and individual literacy.

Continuing the discussion the above, government and officials can also experience misunderstanding and offense. 1) One state official, on his twitter, stated that covid can be cured by basking in the sun. 2) Another official stated that covid will not spread in Indonesia

because it is a tropical country where the covid virus cannot reproduce. 3) There was also the case when the governor of a province in Indonesia stated that the flood is just a very large inundation and the solution is to renovate the house so that it is higher than the road surface or move housing to a flood-friendly area. Those cases above show that even the government officials are still not able to communicate their intentions well so that misunderstanding happens and it feels like a commotion in the midst of people who are feeling restless because of a disaster of Covid-19 Pandemic.

In addition to being considered incompetent in interpersonal communication, the public is also less careful in receiving the information the government provides, this is of course related to the low literacy level they have. 1) In 2021, there was a very popular case with the issue of the ratification of the sexual violence law in which there were those who thought that the law was too liberal, not in accordance with religious norms, and legalized groups (LGBT). 2) In 2022, there was a case where a state official spoke an opinion on the Adhan (Muslim call to worship), mosque loudspeakers and the sound of barking dogs. The latest news on this topic states that the he has been in the custody.

Apart from misunderstanding, cases of offense are also on the rise. This is considered as the impact of the development of Indonesian comedy culture which tends to adopt western methods where people strongly adhere to the freedom of opinion or expression. Indonesia also has a legal law regarding to this rights, but what needs to be considered is that freedom does not mean someone could be freely opened in saying something. Salija, Muhayyung & Rasyid (2018) explain that this freedom is limited to several factors - such as those mentioned above in the interpersonal communication elements – such as ethics and social standards that must be maintained so that there is no friction between individuals.

Though famous cases related to offense are the “Kurma-Babi” case and the “Kucing Gelandangan” case which from two different comedians. They were then policed, and even persecuted by community groups who were offended by their jokes. Mentioned by Helitzer & Shatz (2005) in their book "Comedy Writing Secrets" that comedy certainly requires victims as targets to be laughed at, but what needs more attention is how the jokes are delivered and how the community responds and understands. Plot twist and the use of linguistic figures of speech such as cynicism, sarcasm and satire, euphemisms and justifications are not common things for people who have low literacy where aggressiveness is the first thing to do instead of discussion.

If it is considered reasonable to dispute, take a look at the following case. On March 2020, Indonesia was hit by a Covid-19 pandemic that required people to stay at home as a

form of preventing the spread of the Covid-19 virus known as PPKM. People do work from home (WFH), even as well as shopping does. Digital shopping started to become more common since the outbreak of the digital marketplace a decade ago, but enthusiasm for this has become even higher since the pandemic started. One time, there was a housewife who wanted to order food through an online transportation application. Everything seemed normal until the courier arrived at the customer's house. Within two meters (the courier was in front of the house gate, the woman was at the door house), they interacted and there was an incident of offense. The housewife felt offended and did not accept being called 'kak' by the courier and finally the food was canceled. After the news went viral, the housewife finally apologized and explained that she was being emotional because her child was fussy at that time.

The courier was asked about the purpose of using that word 'kak' in referring her. He explained that he was used to give such 'calling' for people he assumed younger than him as a form of courtesy and intimacy. He explained that people (especially women) tend to like it when they are called with such calling indicating they are seen younger than they really are. But unfortunately, the calling was not appropriate for the housewife who ordered the food. Instead of discussing the incident, the housewife took a one-sided action which ultimately hurt the courier; it was cancelling the order. This indicates that misunderstanding and offense are very serious things to avoid both from the side of the information sender and also the information recipient.

Becoming a Good Communicator

Good communicators aim to understand others before making them understand what is said. They communicate with intention and grasp not only what people are saying through their spoken words, but also recognize what others and themselves convey through body language, emotional responses and vocal quality. They have a keen sense of observation, paying attention to what they see and hear, keeping their perception antennae tuned and registering what they observe. They gauge accurately their surroundings and people's behaviour, noting the mundane, the extraordinary and points in between. They know what they want to accomplish and they are willing to do what they need to do in order to achieve their goals. Before they open their mouths, they set themselves a purpose or plan, something to aim for. Having visualized a desired outcome, they communicate in ways that resonate with their listeners (Tuhovsky, 2019).

When one knows what to be achieved and the message is focused and stated so that the listener can relate to it rather than being confused or threatened - one can communicate with confidence and composure with such intention by gaining control of the goals as well as

maintaining a good conversation. Ralph Waldo Emerson, in Tuhovsky (2019) stated that "A good intention clothes itself with power." When one has a clear intention (as described in the previous section) and speaks with certainty and confidence, it comes across people as meaningful oration. As a result, listeners believe in what has been said. To achieve this, aim and engage with listeners firmly in a proper choice of language and commit it verbally, physically and emotionally concerning thoughts, message and way of speaking. If it is done so, it will be easier to understand rather than understanding people who withstand the emotion.

In delivering sentences with fillers such as 'ers', 'ums' and 'ahs' and put the phrases with 'I think', 'I'll try', 'I guess', 'I hope' and 'like into account, it will sound unsure about the meaning. If it is spoken unsurely, listeners certainly will unsure either. When it feels that those fillers and phrases are about to come, purposely close the mouth and inhale through the nose. It will felt awkward initially, but the audience perceives that as being in control when one momentarily pauses before making the next statement. Even better, sounding and feeling like speaking is in control by eliminating sounds that distract from the point of message.

Increasing the Level of Understanding

The ability to understand is not only specifically for reading but also listening. In the book "*The Lost Art of Listening*" by Nichols (2019), the basic concept for understanding is to have complete information and then extract the details and analyze them so that it becomes an adequate conclusion. In other words, make it a habit to listen or read in full or even repeatedly in order to understand. Specifically in the context of listening, Covey (2020) in his book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* said that "listen with the intention to understand, not to reply". In the digital world, most people only read a piece of information, even just look at the title and then react immediately by responding to what they read.

People must know that reading is a collecting of several ideas. The idea contained in an article can be translated into several sub-ideas to the branch of the story or the root of the problem, so that it can be used as a characteristic of a discussion. To know and understand the series of problems and the sequence of stories easily requires reading skills so that information processing can be carried out properly. Reading is a very important language skill. Good learning is when one knows and is aware of the process being carried out. To be able to understand the contents of the reading contained in a story in a book or paper, an intelligent way is needed to know and understand it (Gunning, 2013).

Often when people read something, from beginning to end, even to the point of repeating it many times, they are still unable understand the contents. Every reading material always has several ideas or subtitles that can be integrated into the main idea. The idea is an integration of several ideas contained in paragraphs or dimensions that are poured into a title that is used as a writing theme. To be able to understand the contents of the reading easily and quickly, a special strategy is needed so that it does not take up time. The strategy can be done through integrating the contents of a reading into the main idea contained in writing and sub ideas into their characteristics. That is, when reading a passage, immediately look for the main idea in each paragraph because the idea of a paragraph can always be translated into several characteristics

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Misunderstandings and offenses are the impact of the individual low level of language literacy and communication skills. This is exacerbated by the more freely someone spreads information in the digital world and leaves it just to be consumed by the general public who tend to like to consume incomplete information but are the fastest in terms of drawing conclusions from what has heard or read. Improving language literacy and communication skills by continuing to learn from various sources and starting to practice them is considered to be able to minimize these issues. However, while improving these abilities, it is better for the producers and the consumers of information to refrain themselves by not saying or writing things that they do not understand and not taking partial conclusions based on mere assumptions and then spreading them for consumption by others who will resulting in a chain effect of unstoppable stupidity systems given the rapid flow of information in this digital era.

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