

SEXUAL PREFERENCE AND GROUP MEMBERSHIP ANALYSIS IN TURN-TAKING SYSTEM OF CASUAL CONVERSATIONS AMONG HOMOSEXUALS

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Abstract

This research is aimed to investigate how sexual preference is displayed. The data of this study are casual conversation among homosexual. The features of the turn-taking system analyzed is topic shift to determine the topics mostly discussed in the conversations. How the choices of the topic induce the in-group membership feeling among the participants will also be analyzed. Qualitative approach, with inferential method, is used in this research. The result of this study shows that the most common topics brought by homosexual during their conversations are relationship/dating, sexuality, dressing up, people and light topics. Furthermore, the sexual preference of the participants provides basic common ground for speakers to initiate the conversations and to develop sense of belonging.

Keywords: conversational analysis, turn-taking system, in-group membership, homosexual

Introduction

During the conversation, participants will unconsciously expose their sexual preference. It is in accordance to Kitzinger's statement (in Cameron & Kullick, 2006) that speakers incidentally expose their sexual preference in their speeches. Thus, it can be said that sexual preference will construct the language produced by the speakers, while, vice versa, the language will represent the sexual preference of speakers.

In this research, the writer chooses conversations among homosexual as the object of the research. Homosexual is not a sexual preference that is widely accepted by common society, homosexual usually do not explicitly show their sexual identities. Thus, by observing the conversations, the writer will be able to investigate how sexual preference is displayed.

Several studies have been conducted to prove that language, gender and sexual preference are, in fact, intertwine one to another. One of

them is the study entitled “Playing the Straight Man Displaying and Maintaining Male Heterosexuality in Discourse” by Scott F. Kiesling in 2002. This research observed the conversations from several groups of heterosexual.

Another study related to sexual preference and language is the study entitled “Speaking as a Heterosexual”: (How) does Sexuality Matter for Talk-in-interaction? by Celia Kitzinger in 2005. Conversation Analysis (CA) was used in this research to analyze many conversations in order to identify how sexuality is naturally exposed during a conversation. Both of the studies indicate how speakers might consciously or unconsciously show their gender and sexuality during the talk-in-interactions.

This discussion is similar to what the writer attempts to explore in this journal as well as the approach used. However, both studies and this journal are different in terms of the focus of discussion. The focus of the first study is how straight men tried to gain control and power in the talk-in-interactions, while the focus of the second one is

how the words uttered represent the sexuality of the speakers. On the other hand, this journal mainly focuses on the turn taking system in the talk-in-interaction. Furthermore, the data of the studies mentioned are mainly the conversations among heterosexual while the data of this study are those among homosexual.

To provide further analysis, the writer also investigates how the topics raised during the conversation induce the in-group membership feeling among the participants. Group membership is defined by Festinger (in McPherson and Smith-Lovin, 2002:3) as the sense of belonging built based on similarity of group members’ characteristics and experience. Durkheim (in Clayman, 2002:3) put this definition under the term of ‘solidarity’. However, the term ‘group membership’ will be used in this study.

Membership is built during the exchange of utterances in a conversation since the speakers will usually explore the similarities among the participants in understanding the world. As the conversation goes, the participants will expose their position as

the result of the negotiation of judgment and experience. The speakers who are able to reach consensus in judging the world are the ones that successfully develop the membership (Eggins and Slade, 1997:276).

Based on the theories and previous studies related to group membership and language and sexual preference, the writer is interested in answering the research problems:

1. How does the topics reflect the sexual preference of the participants?

2. How does the topics reflect the in-group membership of the participants?

The research problem lead the writer into the objective of the research:

1. Describing how the topics discussed reflect the sexuality of the participants

2. Describing how the topics reflect the in-group membership of the participants

In studying the turn taking system, I use the theory of turn taking system explained by Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974). In addition, I also use Tannen's work in Gender and

Discourse to explore the group membership.

2. Underlying Theory

2.1 Conversation Analysis

Conversation Analysis (CA), the legacy of Harvey Sacks, has its roots in ethnomethodology. Unlike interactional sociolinguistics, which is also originated from ethnomethodology, CA is used to analyze conversation without any pre-concept related to the discourse and the background of the participants (Goldkhul: 2003). The focus of CA are what language phenomenon found in the conversation and how every words, phrase, or sentence uttered in the talk-in-interaction contributes to the occurrence of the phenomenon.

The analysis of the talk-in-interaction would be based from the context of the talk itself. There would be no attempt to draw a direct line between the language phenomena to the background of the participants. It is the environment and the situation where the talk-in-interaction takes place that mostly influence the utterances produced.

2.1.1 Turn Taking System

The term 'turn' refers to the moment when utterance is delivered by a speaker. Schegloff (2007:1) explained that participants of conversation would unconsciously observe their partner's turn and the meaning behind the utterances delivered in the turn. Since utterances represent the action the speaker wants to accomplish in his/her turns, the result of the observation towards this then would be a basis for other participants of the conversation to deliver their responses in the following turn. This system is called turn-taking system.

There are three possibilities on how the shifting of speaker might occur. First, the current speaker might choose the next speaker by mentioning the name of the speaker, producing utterance which would be answered only by certain speaker, using tag question in the end of the utterance, or delivering one word question which is related the previous utterance. Second is self-select from the next speaker. It occurs when the previous speakers do not select any particular speaker. Third is the previous speaker will take another turn when the next speakers do not take their turns.

2.2 Topic Shifting

The shifting of topic in the conversation is commonly triggered by several situations such as the failure in the transition of speakers and the occurrence of too many silences (Maynard, 1980:263-290). In a more specific discussion, Caskey (2011: 30) stated that the topics that are often shared to create group identity in the conversations among homosexual are sex, sexuality, dressing up, people, relationship/dating, and non-cerebral topics (topics that do not require critical thought or analysis). Furthermore, Caskey (2011: 30) also argued that rapid turn taking in the talks indicates collaborative talks in which the participants eagerly engage with the topic.

3. Method

This research is a descriptive research because it is intended to describe, analyze and interpret the factual condition. Qualitative approach is used in this research as the main purpose of this study is to describe the turn taking system of conversations observed. Mack (2005: 1) states, "qualitative research is especially effective in obtaining culturally specific information about the values, opinions,

behaviors, and social contexts of particular populations.”

Sacks’s theoretical framework of Conversation Analysis is used to analyze the conversations collected. Meanwhile, inferential method of analysis is applied in interpreting the findings of the research. Inferential method is a process of interpreting data by applying the related knowledge and the information known by the researcher (Krippendorff, 2004: 36-37).

The conversations observed in this study is casual conversations which means that the conversations are non-formal. The participants already know each other and possess equal power. The participants are limited to certain sexual preference.

The data of this study are obtained by recording the conversations. All of the data are recordings of conversations among homosexual. The recordings are taken in three different cities; Banjarmasin, Denpasar, and Jogjakarta.

After the data is collected, the writer will transcribe the conversation based on the Glossary of Transcript Symbols of Jefferson (2004). The symbols [] and = in the transcript represent the interruption. The symbol of [] means the following speaker cuts the current

speaker’ turn. Meanwhile, the symbol of = means that the following speaker continues the current speaker’s turn in almost no gap. In addition, the symbol of () means silence occurs. The number written inside the bracket represent how many seconds the silence occurs.

Once the data is transcribed, the conversation structure is analyzed. The writer only focuses on analyzing the topic shifting to investigate how the participants display their sexual preference.

4. Findings and Discussion

In the following part, the writer describes the topics that commonly found in the conversations among homosexuals. To provide further analysis, the writer also describes how the topics induce in-group membership feeling among the participants.

4.1 Topics and Sexuality

The findings of this study show that the sexual preference of the speaker is reflected through the topic chosen during the conversation. Caskey (2011: 30) stated that the topics that are often shared to create group identity in the conversations sex, sexuality, dressing

up, people, relationship/dating, party/drinking/drugs, people (non-gossip), gossip, pop-culture, work, sports, clothing, suggestive, cerebral (any speech which involves a higher cognitive processing of a theme. Examples include political discussion, psychological analysis of a person, or discussion of current world affairs), and

non-cerebral topics (topics that do not require critical thought or analysis or light topics).

The following extract is an example of how the participants usually bring topics that they know their counterparts will not feel uncomfortable with.

Extract 25. Y and R were talking about the relationship they had

→ Y: *Dia itu dia kaya ngelakuin (2) memperlakukan gue enak aja nyaman*(105)

he he is like do (2) treat me nice like just being comfortable

gitu sebenarnya sama personalitynya dia gue juga ga seratus persen (106)

actually with his personality I am also not a hundred percent

in banget (107)

very in

R: *kalo kata gue ya kalo udah dapat gitu mendingan lu jalanin dulu aja* (108)

In my opinion if you already have like this it's better to just go on

tapi jangan terlalu pake hati [yang gimana gitu] itu kan sakit (109)

just do not give wholeheartedly [things like that] that hurts

Y: *[iya iya iya] iya I know I know* (109)

[yes yes yes] yes I know I know

gue udah anticipate maksudnya ibaratnya kalo misalkan ga ada dia (110)

I already anticipate I mean if for example he is not there anymore

gimana ya udah ga pa pa ga masalah (111)

well that's okay not a problem

.....

→ Y: *And I really know how to work with it sadar ga sih apa yang keluar* (136)

really know how to work with it do you realize what is said by

dari mulut temen- temen gue itu secara gue ga sadar masuk ke otak gue(137)

my friends that will unconsciously get into my brain but only the good

tapi yang bagus yang jelek ga gue gue sort gue sort out gitu dan gue(138)

the bad ones won't I sort I sort it out like that and I

selalu ingat omongan lo itu aduh makcik muka tuh jangan terlalu (139)

always remember what you said that please makcik don't put too

diapa-apain

much thing (on the face)

R: *Iya* (140)

yes

Y: *Gue tuh selalu ingat* (141)

I always remember

R: *Cuci muka juga jangan terlalu di besrek besrek gitu kan* (142)

do not wash your face too rough too rough like that

In this extract, Y initiated new topic by delivering the story about his current relationship in turn (105). R agreed to talk about this topic since in his turn, he comfortably gave his opinion about Y's situation. The talking about this topic was smoothly carried on by the participants until in turn (136) Y abruptly changed the topic into dressing matter. Again, R, instantly agreed about this topic by giving positive response in turn (140).

It was possible for Y to bring the topics of relationship and dressing in

Extract 26. K, T, and R were talking about T's treatment.

T: *Paling setumat ja hilang* (49)

Maybe in a moment it is gone

the conversation because he had knowledge about them and he knew could kept up with the topics. Y also felt confident that R would not find the topics uncomfortable. The choice of the topics in the extract above shows that the speaker has already considered the sexual preference of the counterpart before initiating the topics since the topics cannot be discussed to any people. These typical of topics most likely will not be found in the conversations among straight male or heterosexual.

- K: [*Urang*] *habis meni pedi (1)* (50)
This person (just) had manicure pedicure
- T: [*Meni pedi*] (51)
manicure pedicure
- K: *Padahal kada diapa-apai nya tu lo?* (52)
But they did not do anything, right?
- T: *Kada digisik nya ja* (53)
No they only rub
- R: *Dimana?* (54)
Where?
- T: [*Di Johnny*] *Andrean tadi* (55)
It was in Johnny Andrean
- K: [*Johnny*] (56)
Johnny
Johnny
- T: *Handak batis aja lo ku baik sekalian dah ke tangan koler jua ku me wax*(57)
I only wanted for leg but it's better with hand I also lazy to do wax myself
- K: *Batis tu sedikit ja* (58)
The leg is just a bit

In the previous turn, T and K were talking about T's hands that looked clean and nice. K, then, made a statement in turn (50) to invite R in their conversation. When R gave question in turn (54), it means that he agreed to talk about the topic raised by K in the previous turns. Had R refused to take the turn, the topic would probably be terminated or would only be discussed by K and T.

In this extract, the topic of dressing is raised by K and positively responded by T and R. It is possible for the topic to be initiated and discussed because the participants are familiar about the object of their discussions. They also feel comfortable in talking about the topic.

4.2 Topics and In-Group Membership

The sexual preference of the participants provides basic common ground for speakers to initiate the conversations and to develop sense of belonging. The following extract will provide more insight on how the

membership is developed by bringing certain topics and successfully maintained during the talk. The following extract is another example of how the participants successfully develop their membership by bringing the topic related to dressing.

Extract 26. T, K and R were talking about treatment T had

T: *Paling setumat ja hilang* (357)

Maybe in a moment it is gone

→ K: [*Urang*] *habis meni pedi (1)* (358)

This person after had manicure pedicure

T: [*Meni pedi*] (359)

manicure pedicure

K: *Padahal kada diapa-apai nya tu lo?* (360)

But they did not do anything, right?

T: *Kada digisik nya ja* (361)

No they only rub

R: *Dimana?* (362)

Where?

T: [*Di Johnny*] *Andrean tadi* (363)

It was in Johnny Andrean

K: [*Johnny*] (364)

Johnny

T: *Handak batis aja lo ku baik sekalian dah ke tangan koler jua ku me wax*(365)

I only wanted for leg but it's better with hand I also lazy to do wax myself

K: *Batis tu sedikit ja* (366)

The leg is just a bit

T: *Aku tadi tu=* (367)

Before I was that

K: *=Ngalih lo betunduk? parut gonol ni pang* (368)

- Just difficult to bow, right? With this big tummy
- T: *Aku tu minta anu akan tadi pang kapalannya tu kaya model* (369)
- Well I was just ask for the callus like
- dikikisakan nyaman Kam* (370)
- like to be scrapped feel good You
- K: *Sebulan kah?* (371)
- Is it a month?
- T: *Hiih sebulan iya pulang kapalan pulang sebulan lagi ke situ* (372)
- Yes in month I will get the callus again in a month will go there again
- R: *Berapa meni pedi di sana?* (373)
- How much is the manicure pedicure there?
- T: *Tadi=* (374)
- It was
- K: *=Tadi [enam lima pang]* (375)
- It was six five I guess
- T: *[Rasanya seratus seratus dua]* (376)
- I think a hundred a hundred two
-
- T: *minta meni tangan pedi kaki ni aku minta di anu banar ai di apa nih* (387)
- I ask manicure for hand pedicure for feet I juast ask to do to get
- di rapiakan banar ai* (388)
- just cleaned
- R: *tapi bagus mencilang* (389)
- But good shining
- T: *inya digesekakan nya ja padahal kada pakai kuteks* (390)
- They are just scrubbed though they did not use nail polish
- K: *seminggu ja* (391)
- Only a week
- T: *seminggu paling hilang* (392)
- Maybe a week only before gone
- R: *aku punya yang empat buting tu nah apa sih?* (393)
- I have that four things what is that?

- K: *yang step step* (394)
That step step
- R: *he eh yang empat step tuh step satu step dua* (395)
Yes that four steps the step one step two
- K: *step pertama dikikis* (396)
Step one is scrubbed
- R: *yang gonggong step satu dipakai di sini sakit jadi tipis* (397)
The stupid thing is step one is used in here it hurts and become thin
- K: *ada lo bepandan di kasih lime bebau hangit bila kelawasan bebau* (398)
There is the one use pandanus and add lime smell like
- hangit nya* (399)
burnt when it is too long
- R: *jadi aku langsung pakai step empat kah tuh yang shine langsung* (400)
So I directly use step four the shine
- T: *itu anu tuh dulu tuh sophie martin* (401)
Well, it was the sophie martin
- K: *oriflame sophie martin* (401)
oriflame sophie martin
- T: *aku sophie martin* (402)
I was sophie martin

T in turn (357) by mentioning something related to the mark left after his treatment. K gave a positive response about T's utterance, leading the topic into the conversation. In the following turns, T and K took turns simultaneously in explaining the treatment T had. Since the beginning of the topic until turn (388), R played the role of good listener as he only took one turn during the turn (357) until (388). It

was, then, at turn (389) where R started putting himself as part of the group by giving a compliment to T.

In turn (393), R contributed to the conversation by sharing his experience. This effort was successfully build the membership among the participants since each of them is actively engaged in the conversation by sharing their own experience.

Interruption was occasionally occurred during the exchange of turns.

In this extract, the sexuality of the speakers plays an important role to claim the common ground and to determine the topic of the talk. As mentioned by Caskey (2011), dressing is one of topics raised in the conversation among homosexuals. This finding also shows even though the story contributed in the conversation is limited to each participant's personal experience yet the collaborative talk is still possible to be constructed. It is because the participants have unconsciously reached a consensus about the topic they are talking about. As shown by the previous example, each participant has his own story related to manicure and pedicure. However, the participants have reached the consensus that manicure and pedicure are acceptable to be done by men so sharing any stories related to that topic will not be taken as weird thing.

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Conclusion

Based on the data, most dominant topics found in the conversations among homosexual are relationship/dating, sexuality, dressing up, people and light topics. These topics will be rarely found in the conversations in which the participants are heterosexual men. Thus, it can be concluded that sexual preference of the participants is reflected by the topics chosen during the conversations.

By observing how these particular topics maintained during the conversations, the writer is able to reach the conclusion that the conversations where topic shifting occurs rapidly indicate weak group membership. Meanwhile, the conversations where the participants are able to provide responsive utterances regarding the topic indicate strong group membership.

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