

“Assalamu’alaikum dan Salam Sejahtera” in President Barrack Obama’s Speech at the University of Indonesia Power or Solidarity?

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Abstract: There is a sharp-contradictory opinion toward President Obama’s speech at the University of Indonesia when he uttered Indonesian’s greetings ‘*Assalamualaikum dan salam sejahtera*’. The meaning of his greetings stimulated the people of Indonesia to give their opinion differently whether he showed power or solidarity to the people of Indonesia and the Muslim throughout the world. This is understandable because the greetings raised an ambiguity or paradox in meaning. This study, however, applied Tannen’s power and solidarity and Coupland’s phatic communication to minimize the ambiguity of the greetings. It aims at examining (1) how President Obama enacted the greetings to show his social relationship to the addressees and (2) how the meaning of his greetings are determined to power or solidarity. This is a qualitative research method. The greetings were selected in President Obama’s speech at the University of Indonesia in 2010 as data of this research. The data were analyzed employing a qualitative content analysis. The results showed that President Obama’s greetings were determined to low power or quasi solidarity. It means that President Obama used the greetings in order that Indonesian people will accept him (America) as a friend, to show that there is no fight between America (western people/Christian) and Indonesia (Moslem world). Moreover, Obama applied the expressions are to secure the America’s politics against for terrorism, America wanted that Indonesia will be its friend to fight terrorism and Moslem radicals, and Indonesia will be big new markets for the American’s goods. Thus, the phenomenon of using Indonesian’s greetings, in this sense, cannot be meant only that President Barrack Obama was familiar and close to Indonesia people, but he has another agenda to extend the speaker’s membership of ‘in-group’ in order that the US interests in Indonesia will be accepted by The Indonesian People.

1 INTRODUCTION

There was interesting phenomenon that attracted the audience both in and out of the room where President Obama delivered his speech at the University of Indonesia, November 20th 2010. In his early speaking, he addressed the audiences by employing most familiar greetings ‘*Assalamualaikum dan salam sejahtera*’. What made these greetings interest is they were uttered by President Barrack Obama as the President of the US. The next is what he really intended to utter the greetings? The researcher is interested to conduct a research of examining his greetings whether they referred to power or solidarity. It is not easy job to determine whether his greetings are power or solidarity, or both. To explore this, it is better to cite what Fiske in Nahrkalaji (2009, p 496) said, “Our words are never neutral”. It means that

words can be manipulated according to the speaker’s interest. The manipulation here means that the speaker can control or influence the hearers by employing language use. He employed language use to denote power and create solidarity. Power means to control or influence others, but solidarity means to impress others. The impression and influence have relation to power and solidarity. Power makes inequality position between speaker and hearer, but solidarity makes equality position between speaker and hearer.

There are some stages in studying power and solidarity. They are “how power and solidarity can be measured, what processes underline the formation of power and solidarity, and how these processes are related to speech features” (Ng, 1993, p. 5). Besides, determining power and solidarity in President Obama’s speech needed hard job to identify. Some

people may have different understanding. It can be understood that language is always ambiguous. President Obama’s greetings are no exception. It is not easy job to discover the meaning of his greetings from words alone. As an example, when he greeted the audience by saying “assalamua”alaikum”. The greeting he used in his speech will have another effect for the Indonesian people. The expression used by Obama will have some effects of his interests to the Indonesian people. This can mean that President Obama wants Indonesian people accept him (America) as friend, to show that there is no fight between America (western people/christian) and Indonesia (moslem world). Moreover, Obama applied this expression is to secure the America’s politics against terrorism, America wants that Indonesia will be its friend to fight terrorism and moslem radicals, and Indonesia will be a big new market for the American’s goods. Thus, the phenomenon of solidarity, in this sense, cannot be meant only that President Barack Obama was familiar and close with Indonesian people, but he has another agenda in order that the US interests in Indonesia will be accepted by The Indonesian People.

This phenomenon must be raised to confirm transparency of his greetings’ meanings of what he really said. This study is important for readers, special for the Indonesia people to help them in understanding the real meaning of President Obama’s greetings at the University of Indonesia related to power and solidarity discussion.

President Obama’s greetings in his speech at the University of Indonesia can be called as social practice. In the social practice, he consciously or unconsciously employed language use to demonstrate his identity, his belonging to certain group and his desire to come close or distance himself from the addressees (Formentelli in Al Abdely, 2016, p. 1). Furthermore, there is social relationship in the social practice. This is understandable when a speaker used language, the way he talked to others reflected social relationship. This social relationship is the core of learning power and solidarity.

Based on the description above, the researcher was intended to examine President Obama’s greetings in terms of (1) how President Obama enacted the greetings to show his social relationship to the addressees and (2) how the meaning of his greetings are determined to power or solidarity.

1.1 Power and Solidarity

Power and solidarity are like two sides of a coin. There will be an ambiguity of determining power or

solidarity used by one participant to another in delivering utterances. The utterance of participants in a communication event could account for the particular variety that are related each other. Holmes (2001, p. 8-10) states, “there are four factors influencing the particular context existed in the communication events”. They are the participants, the setting, the topic and the function. The participants relate to the users of language, reflecting the identity of the participants both as who is speaking to whom; the setting relates to the social context of the communication accounting for the place they are speaking; the topic or the purpose of the communication relate to what is being talked about and the function of the communication relate to why they are talking about. Each of the participants will use the strategies reflected in the use of linguistic choices as well as the speaker delivered his speech in the monological paradigm in which the message directed from the speaker to the hearer (Ng, 1993, p 5). The four factors will account for in describing and analyzing the communication events and the factor of participants hold on important roles as well as other factors.

We cannot say that if one speaker uses common language, it means that he or she is equal with other participants as proposed by Tannen that all linguistic strategies are potentially ambiguous as Tannen (1993, p.22) states that:

“Any show of solidarity necessarily entails of power, in that the requirement of similarity and closeness limits freedom and independence. At the same time, any show of power entails solidarity by involving participants in relation to each other”.

From the quotaion above, the researcher can display the ambiguity of closeness as the following:

power	solidarity
asymmetry	symmetry
hierarchy	equality
distance	closeness

Figure 1: Unidimensional model byTannen.

From the figure 1., the researcher can explain that closeness entails solidarity, then, the power relations between participants can be symmetry and equal.

power	solidarity
asymmetry	symmetry
hierarchy	equality
closeness	distance

Figure 2: Unidimensional model adapted from Tannen (by Fajar).

From figure 2., the researcher can examine that closeness entails power until the power relations between participants can be asymmetry and hierarchy. Giving the definition of power and solidarity is an easy job but we will find some problems or difficulties when we try to measure the two terms in the actual interactions of the participants in the communication events. The examination of power and solidarity was initially done by Brown and Gilman (1960) stated that the two persons will not have same level of power because one of them is assumed to have the power to control the talk over another. This explanation influenced so much toward the researcher's understanding on power and solidarity. Power can be defined as the way one interlocutor positioned asymmetrically over other interlocutors. In order words, he or she lays his opponent in the communication as his or her subordinate. This understanding is based on whoever has more power compared to others, he or she will manipulate his language use to identify that he or she has different position over others implicating inequality in the social relationship. Conversely, solidarity shows there is symmetrical relationship between interlocutors in the communication events. There is no subordinate in this paradigm.

1.2 Phatic Communication

In communication, everyone has their own way to negotiate a word or expression in interacting with others according to the certain situation. So we know that different speakers will apply different strategies in order to enact power and solidarity in a communication. One of the strategies that can be used by communicator is by applying phatic communication. There is a development of discussing phatic communication years to years. The term of phatic communication firstly was introduced by Malinowski (in Coupland and Coupland, 1992, p 207).

He defined the concept of the phatic communication is generally used to refer to utterances that are said to have exclusively social, bonding functions like establishing and maintaining

a friendly and harmonious atmosphere in interpersonal relations. These utterances are understood as a means for keeping the communication channel open. Furthermore, Zegarac (1999) states that phatic communication refers to "a kind of communication that is not aimed at obtaining any meaningful information but merely to arouse pleasure among the participants involved".

2 METHOD

Since the study aims at determining the meaning of President Obama's greetings in Indonesian style '*Assalamu'alaikum dan salam sejahtera*', thus, the writer employed qualitative method that is suitable with the characteristics of the qualitative one. The data of this research was taken from a part of President Obama's speech at the University of Indonesia in terms of using greetings as phatic communication. He applied qualitative content analysis in analyzing the greetings.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The fact that President Obama used phatic communication in negotiating his words choices in a relaxed situation is to establish solidarity through several ways when he addressed his speech at the UI. The data on phatic communication can not only be analyzed independently according to its paradigm but those can also be analyzed simultaneously with other theories such as critical discourse analysis and intertextuality. To strengthen the analysis of President Obama's speech at the UI, then, the researcher linked his two other speeches, in Cairo and inauguration in 2009. It is important to know how he transformed his thinking when he delivered a speech on the subjects.

At the beginning of his speech at UI, he used phatic communication quite a lot to attract the enthusiasm of the audience. Analyzing his speech at UI from the perspective of phatic communication is very different from the other perspectives. The researcher may not be trapped in what appears on the surface when he used the word choice giving the impression to the people of Indonesia that he is the one who wants to engage with the audience because he has an agenda that must be achieved through his speech. This corresponds to what is suggested by Scollon and Scollon (2001, pp. 46-47) that can be used to detect what is conveyed by President Obama in his speech at the University of Indonesia, seems to

indicate power, but at the same time can show a solidarity.

When he used phatic communication, of course, President Obama has negotiated a selection of words that correspond to the audience both in the room and outside the room. President Obama’s style when he had to use phatic communication in front of the audience of the University of Indonesia, seemed very close to the audiences and they often gave applause when he delivered his speech in accordance with the values and beliefs of the people of Indonesia. So this has given the impression to the audience that he had a closeness or intimacy to the people of Indonesia. This can be understood because he had lived in Jakarta for some when he was a child so that he has more or less already known the life and culture of the people of Indonesia. Consequently when he addressed the people of Indonesia, he is not awkward anymore, he spoke like talking to their own people.

President Obama not only expressed *Assalamualaikum dan salam sejahtera*” but also some greetings in two languages, Indonesian and English, such as “*Terima kasih. Terima kasih, thank you so much, thank you, everybody. Selamat pagi* in Indonesian as well as “thank It is wonderful to be here at the University of Indonesia” in English, the greetings show gratitude to the audiences. He expressed these different expressions, in response to the warm welcome because of his visit to Indonesia. The audiences looked very happy of his attendance in the University of Indonesia. The expression “*terima kasih and selamat pagi*” can be called as phatic communication. The main function of the phatic communion is that of establishing a social contact between the participants in communication as suggested by Malinowski (1999 [1926], p. 303). Thus, President Obama uttered those to show the atmosphere of togetherness.

3.1 Low Power (Quasi-Solidarity)

However, there are two paradoxical meaning of these greetings, whether President Obama was really involvement or independence with his audiences as explained by Scollon and Scollon (2001, pp. 46-47). He explained that there are two sides of the greetings which appear to be in contrast. On the one hand, in human interactions, President Obama has a need to be involved with other participants and to show them his involvement. On the other hand, President Obama needs to maintain some degree of independence from other participants and to show them that he respected their independence. Besides, President Obama also expressed “It is wonderful to be here at the University

of Indonesia”. This expression is declarative clause. It shows that President Obama was very happy to visit Jakarta, Indonesia. It is understandable that he ever lived in Jakarta when he was a boy. Thus, it can be explained that the beginning and opening words in his speech aimed to win the attention and good will of the audience. In other words, President Obama started his speech by giving thanks and greetings to the audiences before introducing the cases in an interesting and favorable light.

In addition, President Obama also greeted the people of Indonesia in his speech by greeting the use of the Arabic language as well as Indonesian language ie, “*assalamualaikum dan salam sejahtera*”. “*Assalamualaikum*” greeting typically used by Muslims met a Muslim, while greeting “*salam sejahtera*” used typically by Indonesian people welcomed his friends from different religions.

The meaning of ‘*assalamualaikum*’ according to Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia refers to “*keselamatan (kesejahteraan, kedamaian) untukmu (biasanya diucapkan pada awal dan akhir pidato, saat bertemu dengan seseorang, dan sebagainya)*”. According to the understanding of the Indonesian people, especially Muslims, it has meaning that is more in a kind of prayer as well as the use of the name of God. Thus, before it is spoken, it is necessary understanding of the cultural sign of Muslim life. Based on this explanation, it can be stated that President Obama understood and was aware of this culture of Indonesia. Thus, when he greeted the audiences by saying ‘*assalamualaikum*’, it means that he applied a cross-cultural approach as a way of understanding Indonesian culture to get response from the audiences as group of humans who majority are the Muslims on the certain environment, in this case, at the University of Indonesia, in order to meet needs and make involvement or intimacy in a range of interaction process during his speech.

The use of greeting *assalamualaikum* will have different meaning when it is spoken by a non-moslem as well as a president of superpower country. The greeting he used in his speech will have another effect for the Indonesian people. The expression used by Obama will have some effects of his interests to the Indonesian people. This can mean that President Obama wants Indonesian people will accept him (America) as friend, to show that there is no fight between America (western people/christian) and Indonsia (moslem world). Moreover, Obama applied this expression is to secure the America’s politics against for terrorism, America wants that Indonesia will be its friend to fight terrorism and moslem radicals, and Indonesia will be a big new markets the

American's goods and President Obama used this expression to have an overt topic-priority relevance that he provided a formal early opportunity to the hearers to make some current state of being a matter of joint priority concern. Thus, the phenomenon of closeness, in this sense, cannot be meant only that President Barack Obama was familiar and close with Indonesia people, but he has another agenda in order that the US interests in Indonesia will be accepted by The Indonesian People. Thus, what and how he speaks will affect the Indonesian people's thinking way that can be called as the US hegemony toward the Indonesian people.

The construction of President Obama as an individual having much knowledge of other country's culture can be found in his utterances when he greeted the audience '*assalamu'alaikum dan salam sejahtera*' that can be called as phatic communication. He used this greeting to attract the enthusiasm of the audience to show his solidarity in starting a conversation as suggested by Jumanto (2014). Explicitly, he used phatic communication showing his high intelligent to identify the situation he faced when he delivered his speech. To give the impression to the people of Indonesia that he is not the enemy but he is the person who wants to engage with the Indonesia people. This phatic communication can be concluded that based on the analysis of the surface level, it showed his solidarity but implicitly showed his 'soft power' to influence the emotion of the Indonesia people to accept him as the member of their group.

Then, he constructed himself as an individual of having much experience when he was still a boy and ever lived in Jakarta in talking about his neighbors, friends and religion life. This identity cannot be substituted by others meaning that his individual experience of living together and harmony with Muslims could make him feel at home. This experience by him could be an example to show the people around the world that they can live harmony without regarding their faith and belief because they think that faith and belief are their business to God. Furthermore, his exercise of solidarity can also be known from the data 'I am so glad that I made it back to Indonesia and that Michelle was able to join me' and 'We had a couple of false starts this year, but I was determined to visit a country that's meant so much to me'. In these utterances, President Obama applied the pronoun 'I' in the beginning of his speech and combined the pronouns of 'I' and 'we' in these utterances. It means that he changed his identity both as personal and institutional. It can be explained

that he wanted to activate the audiences' emotions by doing personal approach to show his both identity.

His identities played important roles to show his solidarity by including oh his positive politeness directly to the addressees by saving Indonesia's faces. The use of positive politeness strategies in appropriate can help him succeeded in showing his solidarity. Thus, President Obama strongly realized this so he chose words to respect the audiences by demonstrating intimacy and solidarity by strengthening them feel good and be friends by saving Indonesia's faces as suggested by Jumanto (2014). His strategies of using direct positive politeness to get in touch with the Indonesia people is also supported by his positive lexicalization as in the utterances from the datum, 'Let me begin with a simple statement: *Indonesia bagian dari didi saya*'. The utterances are so effective to influence and control the addressees' mind about his visit to Indonesia. They activated the Indonesia people's emotion that his visit will not threaten the existence of Indonesia both cultural and authority. There important pronouns of the utterances, they are 'I', 'President', 'Friend' and 'our'. The pronouns are simultaneously arranged with the adjective phrase showing direct positive politeness and positive lexicalization in the datum, 'So today, I return to Indonesia as a friend, but also as a President who seeks a deep and enduring partnership between our two countries. (Applause.)'. These data showed that President Obama shifted his identities as portrayed in the use of pronouns 'I', 'President' and 'Friend' reflecting the multiplicities of both individual and institutional identities then he used the pronoun 'our' construct the identity of the Indonesia people as the member of his in-group although he did not explicitly express based on the analysis of the surface level of the utterance. These shifting reflected the changes of identity from the 'self' as individual into the collective 'self' as a member of a group. It means that President Obama requested the Indonesia people's reactions to ask them agree with his proposal of making partnership between two countries.

Of the above argumentation, the meanings of the greetings referred to *low power* or *quasi-solidarity*. It indicates that there is no real solidarity. This can be understood because what a speaker says in surface performance is like showing his or her solidarity to addressees, but if the analysis showed there is a hidden agenda to extend the membership of the addressees into the speaker's in-group, meaning the utterances refer to *low power*. This finding is also related to the hegemony, in this sense, that America would like to gain support for itself from other

country (Indonesian people) in taking into consideration “the interests and tendencies of groups over which hegemony is to be exercised” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 161). Furthermore, President Obama has any concessions that he should do this in order to “demonstrate” that America would like to teach their moral, their ideas, their values and political leadership in the general public, particularly their central claim to political legitimacy.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Based on the analysis, the researcher could conclude power and solidarity reflected in the use of greetings in President Obama’s speech at UI can be explored by applying critical discourse analysis. The use of greetings ‘Assalamu’alaikum dan Salam sejahtera’ has the meaning of *low power* or *quasi-solidarity* to show America’s hegemony toward Indonesia and Indonesia. President Obama used power and solidarity in order that Indonesian people will accept him (America) as friend, to show that there is no fight between America (western people/christian) and Indonesia (Moslem world). Moreover, Obama applied the expressions are to secure the America’s politics against for terrorism, America want that Indonesia will be its friend to fight terrorism and moslem radicals, and Indonesia will be a big new markets for the American’s goods. Thus, the phenomenon of solidarity, in this sense, cannot be meant only that President Barrack Obama was familiar and close with Indonesia people, but he has another agenda in order that the US interests in Indonesia will be accepted by The Indonesian People.

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