



**CAPTIONS WRITING IN *INSTAGRAM*:
UNDERSTANDING THE MEANING AND
THE COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTION IN LEARNING A LANGUAGE**

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Abstract. This study was conducted to investigate the language functions used in captions written in *Instagram* and reveal the meaning behind it. It was undertaken by analyzing the captions written by Ani Yudhoyono in her personal *Instagram*. The descriptive qualitative design was implemented in the recent study. The result of the analysis revealed that all six elements of communication were found, namely addresser, context, message form, contact, common code, and addressee. Five functions of language and its combinations were being used in the captions in order to ensure message delivery. The language function mostly used was referential function with twenty five sentences used or 58.1%. The caption needs to use this function because *Instagram* photos require a lot of information to be informed to the followers in order to get the message of the photo through the caption. The meanings given were also varied, yet they were all positive.

Keywords: *captions, Instagram, language function*

Introduction

In this era, people use social media as the facility of communication to keep in touch with family as well as new and old friends. Regardless of distance, the existence of social media enables people who disconnected with others to rebuild their relationships. The term "social media" refers to the wide range of Internet-based and mobile services that allow users to participate in online exchanges,

contribute user-created contents or join online communities (Dewing, 2012, 1). There are several prominent examples of social media, such as facebook, twitter, google+, *Instagram* and wikipedia.

Compared to other social media such as *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Path*, *Line*, and *Whatsapp*, *Instagram* is a mobile application that allows users to upload their photos and videos as well as apply digital filter and share it to the other social media such as *Facebook* and *Twitter*. It was created in October 2010 by Kevin Systrom, a computer programmer and internet businessman (Rizky, 2013). *Instagram* offers some features such as a filter to edit the image perfectly and captions to describe the photos and videos while uploading them.

As *Instagram* getting more popular, its users have reached 400 million in 2015 (Widiartanto, 2015). Although *Instagram* offers several features, the results of the questionnaire in the preliminary study showed that most of the respondents preferred to see the pictures than reading the captions because they believed that pictures were more interesting and entertaining than the captions. On the other hand, understanding the meaning and communicative function through the captions is imperative for any language learner. Savignon (1983) described a language function as the use to which the language is put, the purpose of an utterance rather than the particular grammatical form an utterance takes. In other words, language functions refer to what people do through language.

Brown and Yule (1983) approved only two terms to describe and explain the primary functions of language. The function which language serves in the expression of content and it is involved in expressing social relations and personal attitudes, they describe as transactional. In Brown and Yule (1983:2), Lyons observes that the assumption of communication is easily used feelings, moods and attitudes. Meanwhile, Bennett remarks ‘it seems likely that communication is primarily a matter of a speaker’s seeking either to inform a hearer of something or forbid some action upon him’. The language which is used to deliver factual or proportional information is called primarily transactional language. In primarily transactional language, Brown and Yule (1983) assumed that the speaker or writer has the efficient transfer of information primarily in their mind.

Whereas linguists, philosophers of language and psycholinguists paid attention to the use of language for the transmission of factual or proportional information, sociologists and sociolinguists have been particularly concerned with the use of language to establish and maintain social relationships. Conversational analysts have been particularly concerned with the use of language to negotiate role-relationships, peer-solidarity, the exchange of turns in a conversation, the saving of face of both the speaker and hearer (Brown and Yule, 1983:3). It is clearly the case that a great deal of everyday human interaction is characterized by the primarily interactional rather than the primarily transactional use of language.

Jakobson's model of the functions of language distinguishes six elements or factors of communication, that are necessary for communication; addresser (a sender, speaker, writer); addressee (a receiver, hearer); contact: a physical channel and psychological connection between an addresser and addressee; common code (language); and message (Jakobson, 1985:143). Each factor is the focal point of a relation or function that operates between the message and the factor (Hebert, 2011). The functions are Referential Function, Emotive Function, Conative Function, Phatic Function, Metalingual Function, and Poetic Function.

So far there have been many studies conducted on language functions such as Hasits (2007), Yunita (2013), Syafitri (2014), Arista (2014), and Machmud (2015). They analyzed the kind of language functions, and the language function mostly used. The recent study is similar to them in terms of the problem of the study. Yet, their studies focused on language functions produced by main characters in various movies. Therefore, the recent study is different from previous studies in terms of subject, genre and theory. Focusing on writing caption in *Instagram*, Any Yudoyono's *Instagram* was the object to be analyzed for several reasons. First, she is a public figure whose *Instagram* followers reach 4.9 million. Second, she has consistently written the captions in two languages: Bahasa Indonesia and English to tell about the photos or videos she uploaded so far.

Related to the background of the study, the writer formulates some problems in analyzing language function found in Ani Yudhoyono's captions on *Instagram*. Those are:

1. What are language functions found in Ani Yudhoyono's captions in her *Instagram*?
2. What are the meaning behind language functions of Ani Yudhoyono's *Instagram* captions?

Methods

The descriptive qualitative design was implemented since it dealt with the language data and its component—the kinds of language functions and the meanings behind language function in Ani Yudhoyono's *Instagram* captions. The data were analyzed and interpreted as stated by Sandelowski (2000:1) that researchers conducting qualitative descriptive studies stay close to their data and to the surface of words and events, qualitative descriptive designs typically are an eclectic but reasonable combination of sampling, data collection, analysis, and representation techniques.

As the main instrument, the writers collected the data by choosing Ani Yudhoyono's photos uploaded in her *Instagram* account randomly to avoid any particular tendency, printing the selected photos, underlining the words, phrases or sentences. The data of the research were the words, phrases or sentences which contained six language functions based on the Jakobson's theory. The data source of this study was Ani Yudhoyono's captions which were taken from Ani Yudhoyono's *Instagram* account @aniyudhoyono in 2015. Jakobson's theory about language functions was used in analyzing the data. It involved six functions, they were referential, emotive or expressive, conative or directive, phatic, metalingual and poetic function. Firstly, the writers classify the data by connecting it to the theory. Secondly, they looked for the language function mostly used on Ani Yudhoyono's *Instagram* captions. Last, they analyzed more detail by seeing and reading the text and its context of Ani Yudhoyono's *Instagram* captions to get what actually the meaning behind language function of Ani Yudhoyono.

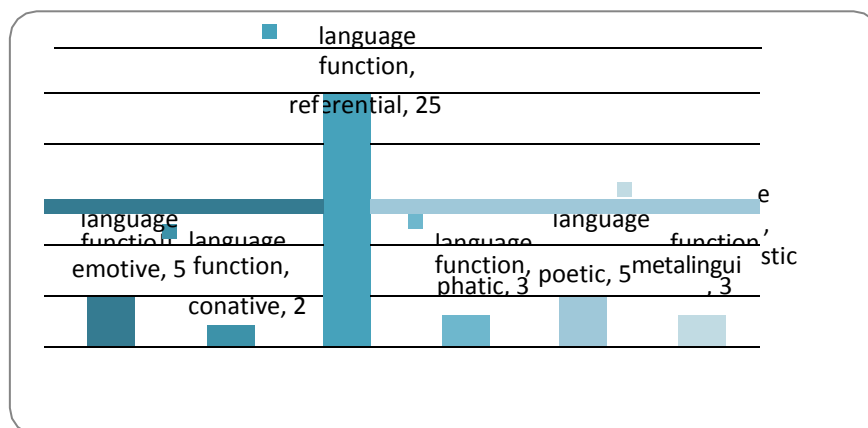
Findings and Discussion

In communication, language can be classified into two types which are verbal and non-verbal language (Chand, 2015: 1). Verbal language is a form of communication which is delivered by the speaker to hearer in written and spoken to express ideas, feelings, emotions and desires as stated by Hanes (2015) that verbal communication refers to the use of sounds and language to relay a message for expressing desires, ideas and concepts and as vital to the processes of learning and teaching. It is one of the ways to communicate with others. Several of the key components of verbal communication are sound, words, speaking and language.

Happiness, sadness, fear and anxiety are universal emotion which is similar to non verbal way of language. Non verbal language is expressing meaning or feeling without words such as gesture, body language, eye contact, facial expression, space, picture and painting. It can be said as the process of communication by sending and receiving message without saying a word at all or wordless. Such wordless message can be communicated through gestures, body language, facial expressions and postures (Mikoluk, 2015, p. 5). Other forms of nonverbal communication include dance and music, as well as more directly representing and imitative arts such as miming, drawing, painting, sculpture and architecture (Rosengren, 2000).

Instagram is included into both verbal and non verbal language. It is called verbal language because it has the captions which are delivered by Ani Yudhoyono in written to express desires, ideas and concepts and as vital to the processes of learning and teaching as stated by Hanes (2015). Meanwhile, non verbal language can be communicated by gestures, body language, facial expressions, postures, pictures and painting (Mikoluk, 2015, p. 5). So, the photos of Ani Yudhoyono’s *Instagram* are included into non verbal language because it consists of the pictures. To make a clear cut understanding of the findings, the writer puts them into a chart

Figure 1. The Frequency of Language Functions



After analyzing the data, six language functions were found in Any Yudhoyono’s *Instagram* captions, they were emotive function, conative function, referential function, phatic function, poetic function and metalinguistic function.

Language function that was mostly used was referential function. In details, there were five expressive functions, two directive functions, twenty five referential functions, three phatic functions, five poetic functions, and three metalingual functions.

Based on the findings, the language function that is mostly used was referential function because the *Instagram* photo requires a lot of information, such as description of object, situation or mental state, to be informed to the readers against the photos through the caption. As we know *Instagram* consists of the photos as well as videos. Absolutely, the captions are related to the photos or videos that have more information of the photos and the role of the captions is describing the object, situation or mental state of photos. In other words, the captions have function to convey information by describing the object, situation or mental state of the photos. *Instagram* caption is included into communication in one way. It could be occurred because there is no feedback between the writer (addresser) and the reader (addressee). So, language function that is mostly used by Ani Yudhoyono in her *Instagram* captions is referential function.

Besides, the two conative functions were also found. They were included into the lowest frequency category. Yet, in opposite, the spoken language which was found by Arum (2015) in *-Enchanted* movie script that the language function mostly used is directive function. Clearly, it is very different from the captions in Ani Yudhoyono's *Instagram* in which the writer only found two directive functions. Conative function engages the addressee to act or do something such as in commands or requests, meanwhile *Instagram* caption mostly has function to deliver information, describe the object, situation or mental state based on the photos or videos.. It could be possible to ask the reader to do something in written language, yet it would not get direct response from the reader, for example *-Let us begin this day with gratitude for blessings from Allah SWT*, maybe the reader does not want to do it directly. Realizing that *Instagram* has limitation in asking the reader to do something directly in written language Any Yudhoyono, therefore rarely used conative function.

The writers only found out three phatic functions in Ani Yudhoyono's *Instagram* captions because it is associated with the contact or channel factor and to open communication. Generally, greeting others is common and more effective if it is done directly. Similar to metalinguistic, the writer also found out three sentences. According to Jakobson (1960), metalinguistic is the use of language to discuss or describe itself and to clarify or renegotiate it. The writer also found it on Ani Yudhoyono's *Instagram* captions, such as "Banksia flower. Wild flowers collection of King Park, Perth, Australia". Wild flower has function to discuss the previous sentence namely Banksia flower. Giving an accosting and a definition is mostly appeared in spoken language, such as *-good morning, Sir* and *-I do not know what do you mean by Pecel?* Meanwhile *Instagram* captions is included into written language, so the writer only found out the phatic and metalinguistic function in small number of occurrences. Metalinguistic also could be found in science book because there are many definitions that explain the language itself.

Meanwhile, the emotive and poetic function was also in the same position. Emotive function is related to addresser. Language is used by the addresser to express her or his feelings. It focused on the addresser, aims a direct expression of the speaker's attitude toward what he or she is speaking about. It tends to produce

an impression of a certain emotion whether feigned or true (Jakobson, 1960:354). Ani Yudhoyono's *Instagram* captions have five emotive and poetic functions because the caption usually is used to express the emotion such as happiness, sadness, etc, and to deliver the hidden message. In his book entitled "Linguistics and Poetics", Jakobson stated that the political slogan "I like Ike" /ay layk ayk/, succinctly structured, consists of three monosyllables and counts three diphthongs /ay/ (Jakobson, 1960:357). It also appeared on the caption which is analyzed by the writer in Ani Yudhoyono's *Instagram* that "A beautiful morning makes the heart sings." It has the same sound namely /ing/.

Besides, the language also has the primary functions that are approved by Brown and Yule (1983), such as transactional and interactional. The language which is used to deliver factual or proportional information that is called primarily transactional language. In primarily transactional language, Brown and Yule (1983) assumed that the speaker or writer has the efficient transfer of information primarily in their mind and it is concerned with the use of language to establish and maintain social relationships. It also appears in Ani Yudhoyono's *Instagram* captions that Ani Yudhoyono uses the language to deliver factual or proportional information which called primarily transactional language, for example "*The GGGI (Global Green Growth Institute) Assembly, attended by 24 member countries and observers. Seoul, South Korea, 18 November 2015*". From such caption, it could be seen that Ani Yudhoyono delivers factual information. As stated previously, the primarily interactional language is focused on the use of language to establish and maintain social relationship. In Ani Yudhoyono's *Instagram* captions, she also tries to establish and maintain social relationship, yet the social relationship in *Instagram* is not efficient because it is the communication in one way. It means that if the followers give the comments, she will not reply. Nevertheless, Ani Yudhoyono keeps the social relationship with the followers by giving a caption, such as "*Waiting for my grandchildren to come at the weekend. Have a great weekend everybody*". She gives a greeting to keep the social relationship between her and the followers.

Conclusion and Suggestion

Conclusion

After analyzing Ani Yudhoyono's captions in her *Instagram* personal account, it is found that there are five emotive functions, two conative functions, twenty five referential functions, three phatic functions, five poetic functions and three metalinguistic functions. Based on such findings, the language function mostly used in the Ani Yudhoyono's *Instagram* captions is referential function which occurs twenty five times used to inform or describe about object and situation to make a clear the photos. It could occur because the *Instagram* has function to give information such as description of object, situation or mental state. As we know that people can upload photos and videos in *Instagram*, certainly, the captions are not far from what happens in the photos or videos.

Besides, there are several meanings behind the language functions found in Ani Yudhoyono's *Instagram* captions. First, the meaning behind emotive function of Ani Yudhoyono's *Instagram* captions are expressing emotion of happiness and admiration, such as -so fun!, -we are happy!, -wow!. Second, the meaning behind conative function of Ani Yudhoyono's *Instagram* captions is persuading

the followers to do positive activity, such as persuade the followers to be grateful. Third, the meaning behind referential function in Ani Yudhoyono's *Instagram* captions are informing and describing the activities of her husband, the cities which are visited by Ani Yudhoyono and her works in photography. Fourth, the meaning behind phatic function of Ani Yudhoyono's *Instagram* captions is greeting the followers indirectly. Fifth, the meaning behind poetic function is delivering the positive messages, such as -Sincerity to forgive is a noble deed, -Love one another, and there will be peace in the world. Sixth, the meaning behind metalinguistic function is describing the languages or terms which are not clear.

Suggestion

Finally, dealing with the findings above, students do need to understand the meaning and the communicative function of a language in order to learn the language. Specifically in learning a foreign language, grammar will not be enough to prepare the language learners for using the language independently and communicatively. As the present students are Net Generation, they often find their own reasons for becoming literate—reasons that go beyond reading to acquire school knowledge or mastery of academic texts. Therefore, the use of *Instagram*, especially the captions writing in English can be valuable practice for them to write in English; people's captions writing in English also provide exposures for them as language learners in terms of English functions in real context, as opposed to what they literally mean.

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