

Research Article

Invisible Meaning on Spongebob Meme

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History

Received: August 02, 2020

Accepted: September 05, 2020

Volume:3

Issue: 9

DOI: 10.32996/ijllt.2020.3.9.1

KEYWORDS

Spongebob Meme, Violation of Maxim, Implicature

ABSTRACT

Pertaining to the phenomenon of Spongebob meme, the writers are interested to discuss meaning of Spongebob meme with involving a study of linguistic. The objective of the research is to answer how violations of maxims are showed on Spongebob meme, and what the meanings of it. The writers took Spongebob meme from as a substance to be analysed. This paper uses descriptive qualitative method. The data are analysed using the violations of maxims to arise the implicature based on Grice, semiotic triangle theory based on Richard and Ogden, and the meanings of Spongebob meme are concluded by using inference theory. The result indicates that each Spongebob meme possess different violations of maxims.

1. Introduction

Many sites of social media have been spreading widely in environment of society. There include: Facebook, Twitter, Path, Instagram, and so on. These social media allow people to greet with other people across the globe, communicate with friends, share photos or music, express themselves, and write about what is on their minds. Usually, people like to post everything they do. Recently, there is a new style of creative picture that is often used by teenagers and have spread widely on social media. These creative pictures are even used as their account profile picture. These pictures are called Memes. This phenomenon has become a new culture in this modern age.

Meme is a picture with a statement on it. Memes use photos of people or characters. Character pictures that are often used on meme are usually famous people in the world such as: Yao Ming, a basketball athlete from Korea, or cartoon characters like Spongebob, The Simpson, and others. Every meme has a different statement to express a message. The statements on memes are usually opinion, idea, critic, expression, motivation, and others, related to real life phenomena.

Those statements are presented with humor sense. Thus, it makes memes seen as comic. Humor is the way of memes conveying meanings to readers on social media. Accordingly, it can be said that meme is used as a new communication channel. When a message is put into a meme and presented to readers, they respond it by giving feedbacks through meme too.

Blackmore (cited in Paull, 2009) stated that people can write their ideas and opinions freely on meme. Popular phenomena that are happening in the society become good materials to be written down on meme. Particular features of meme messages are easy to say, or almost force their hosts to publicize them on. These include bits of juicy scandals, amazing news, comforting ideas of various persons, or useful instructions. Meme is also used as protest media towards political issues. Open social media for public makes society start to get a democracy by writing their opinions or critics through memes.

Spongebob meme is one of many favorite memes. This meme shows a piece of Spongebob's film scenes as its picture. People use those scenes to arrange a statement in conveying their idea. It is not only Spongebob character used on this meme, but also all others characters on Spongebob film. People make it into a virtual comic.

Nowadays, there are many sites that accommodate memes. This site becomes a place for collections of memes. Many people upload and share their memes on it. Meme has a meaning and a message to be delivered. The meaning is not been clearly stated. Linguistic study defines that every utterance or statement has a meaning to be delivered whether the meaning is invisible or unclear.

In accordance figuring out meanings of utterances, Pragmatic, a part of linguistics, is the study of invisible meaning or how to recognize what is meant even when it is not actually said or written. Implicature is one of all theories on pragmatic that describes emergence meaning when the speaker or the hearer violates a maxim in communication. When the speaker says something, there is a message that wants to be delivered. Pertaining to the study, it can be said that meme is an utterance form of the speaker.

Seeing the phenomenon of memes in this modern age, the writers were interested into discussing the meaning of memes from the perspective of linguistic studying. The writers took Spongebob meme as research data to be analyzed. The writers used theories of pragmatic study, especially maxim and implicature as tools to analyze the meaning. Through this paper, the writers tried to identify violations of maxims on Spongebob meme and find out the meaning of them.

2. Literature Review

Pragmatics is concerned with the meaning of utterance or sentence. Meyer (2009) distinguished an interpretation about meaning between grammatical and pragmatic, "We need to understand the entire social context in which a sentence was uttered, a different level of interpretation that is studied within pragmatics, which explores the role that context plays in the interpretation of what people say". This can be understood that the role of pragmatic in interpreting a meaning is so wide. It is not enough to know a meaning of words only.

In conversation, participant and interlocutor give a contribution to mutual information exchanges. In linguistic, there is a theory of cooperative principles. This theory discusses principles that occur in conversation. H. Paul Grice (1976), the philosopher, proposed the cooperative principles (maxim) to explain how conversation involves a certain level of "cooperation" among communicants (Meyer, 2009).

Grice (2004:45) explained in his book *Logic and Conversation*. This book was reprinted in 2004. In his book, the co-operative principle is stated in the following way, "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purposes or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged. One might label this the Cooperative Principle".

Supporting with this principle, Grice proposed four maxims to explain how people cooperate when they speak. Those four are Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner. It is often called the "Gricean Maxims".

1. Quantity

According to (Ephratt, 2012), the Grice's statement of quantity of maxim "Do not make your contribution more informative than is required". He explained, "In all of Grice's statements of this maxim he says "more information", not "less informative". Grice splits the quantity category into two maxims. Prior to the maxim just quoted, he postulates that the contribution should be "as informative as required". "As informative" clearly means (by Implicature) informative enough, not less".

For example:

- a. *John likes black coffee.*
- b. *John who is son of bank manager, likes black coffee.*

From those two examples above, it can be concluded that the sentence of number one has very cleared and presented an informative. The meaning of sentence one can be understood by interlocutor without adding another information, while in sentence of number two has some more of information. It makes a sentence become too long. Pertaining with maxim of quantity itself, it violates the rules.

2. Quality

In maxim of quality, participant is expected to say or write the truth of what he/she belief, and it is connected with fact. This emerges a set of three problems. Those are appropriating with assumption of the truth, second is appropriating with logic of belief, and the last is involving in the nature of adequate evidence. In a conversation, each participant must say the truth, he/she may not say what he believes to be false, and may not say something that he/she has no adequate evidence. (Meyer, 2009).

3. Relation

Dascal in (Ephratt, 2012) explained, "There is a sense in which a certain concept of relevance, perhaps not identical with the one required of R [Grice's relation of maxim], governs the operation of the other supermaxims, as if the CP [Cooperation Principle] itself were a principle of 'relevance' rather than a principle of cooperation". Dascal argued that the other maxims are also a concept of relevance. Looking back at the rules of each maxims, they expect a connection in contribution which participants should give something agree with what is required.

For example:

John: Where is the roast beef?

Ann: The dog looks happy.

The example of conversation above that Ann does not give a certain answer for John's question. It is clearly that utterance *The dog looks happy* has no relevancy with what is required by John. In that case, Ann's answer has a means to inform john something like '*In answer to john's question, the beef has been eaten by the dog*', but Ann's does not say it which constitute a relevancy of that conversation. Looking back at the rules of relation, Ann has violated maxim of relation.

4. Manner

Grice (2004:47) explained the last analogy (maxim of manner). He said, "I expect a partner to make it clear what contribution he is making, and to execute his performance with reasonable dispatch". It means that participants are expected make a conversation to be clear. Grice expected a cooperative response by following the rules of manner. That explanation describes the rules of Manner. The speaker should clearly in saying something. In this maxim, participant is expected to make highly clarity of expression in conversation. An ambiguous phrases and utterances are things which should be faded on their existence. High level of clarity will make the ambiguous arrive on low level. (Meyer, 2009).

Atlas (2005) explained, "These maxims and the cooperative principles are offered in explanation of what a speaker implies, suggests, or means, as contrasted with what he said (as started) in uttering sentence". According to (George Yule, 2010) about the four maxims, "It is certainly true, an occasion, we can experience conversational exchanges in which the cooperative principles may not seem to be in operation".

Grice drew an important distinction between what a speaker means or implies and what a sentence or other expression means or implies. (Wayne A. Davis, 2007) said, "Grice (1957) was the first to systematically study cases in which speaker meaning differs from sentence meaning. He introduced the verb *implicate* and the cognate noun *implicature* as technical terms denoting "the act of meaning or implying something by saying something else." Grice coined this technical term to explain that what is said by speaker does not always agree with what he/she wants to be said certainly.

Grice described that implicature will arise if cooperative principles or maxims of conversation are violated. This case was described in (Atlas, 2005).

On the assumption that the speaker is able to fulfill the maxim and to do so without violating another maxim (because of a clash), is not opting out, and is not, in view of the blatancy of his performance, trying to mislead. . . . How can his saying what he did say be reconciled with the supposition that he is observing the overall Cooperative Principle? This situation is one that characteristically gives rise to a Conversational Implicature; and when a conversational implicature is generated in this way, I shall say that a maxim is being exploited.

From Grice's explanation, it can be said that conversation should be cooperative among communicants. The speaker is expected to run the rules of maxims in saying something with the result that "cooperation" stay on the way. The speaker may not violate maxim in leading communication. It will make Implicature arise on that situation.

According to Lumsden in *Journal of Pragmatics* (2008:2), “Grice’s explanation of the generation and detection of such implicatures depends on a fundamental principle (Maxims)”. It can be said that if cooperative principles are required, it will fade an invisible meaning of utterance.

Futhermore, formal utterance can also be analyzed by using Grice Theory. (Al-Hamadi, 2009) argued in his research that he analyzed some western Politicians utterances using Grice’s conversational maxim violations. It indicates that Grice theory can be applied in many formal and informal situations.

Triangle Semiotic

Semiotic is a study of the sign. The sign itself includes many aspects of social life. In a semiotic sense, signs take the form of words, images, sounds, gestures and objects. What about people say, draw, and activate are an object that is used as a sign. In semiotic studying, it is not only to know the signs in object. Sign-system is a part of semiotic that study of how meanings are made and how reality is represented (Chandler, 2007).

Richard and Ogden as quoted by (Chandler, 2007) proposed the diagram of Semiotic Triangle. This theory describes the process of how meaning is presented. It involves symbol, thought, and things at the corner sides. They show the relation among words (Symbol), thoughts, and things, but there is the indirectness line between words and things.

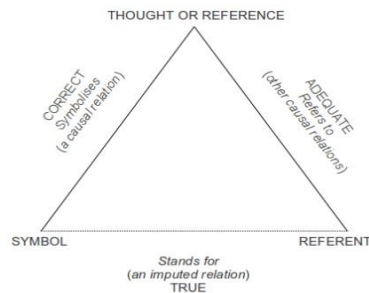


Figure 1. Richard and Ogden’s model of Semiotic Triangle

Figure above shows that the three elements dominate the process. Richard and Ogden in Sandulasccu (2013:41) explained about symbol, “Symbolism is the study of the part played in human affairs by language and symbols of all kinds, and especially of their influence on Thought. It singles out for special inquiry the ways in which symbols help us and hinder us in reflecting on things”. It can be said that Symbol is a sign in language and other forms. It also become an essential element which influence thought and things.

Inference

Inference is one of the other parts in pragmatic. Inference has a relation with implicature. If implicature is an invisible meaning that is implied by speaker, inference is a process for the hearer to draw a conclusion of what that meaning of speaker said. This definition was explained by (George Yule, 2010), “An inference is additional information used by the listener to create a connection between what is said and what must be meant”.

Horn and Ward (2006:6) also verified relation between the speaker and the hearer in running conversation that including implicature on it. They said, “A speaker S saying p and implicating q can count on her interlocutor to figure out what S meant (in uttering p at a given point in the interaction) from what was said, based on the assumption that both S and H are rational agents. Speakers implicate, hearers infer”. It can be illustrated that inference is as a container used by hearer to intercept a message or meaning of implicature that is said by speaker.

Meme

An ability of human to think ahead still runs until make technology become a source of much media. Meme is the one of much media which becomes a new culture in modern age.

The term “Meme” was proposed by Richard Dawkins in 1976 in his book *The Selfish Gene*. This book is reprinted in 2006. Dawkins (2006:192) said, “We need a name for the new replicator, a noun that conveys the idea of a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation. 'Mimeme' comes from a suitable Greek root, but I want a monosyllable that sounds a bit like 'gene'. I hope my classicist friends will forgive me if I abbreviate Mimeme to *Meme*”. He explained that Meme is the new

replicator in this modern age. The word 'replicator' means an imitation, because this tool describes small unit of culture that spread from person to person by copying or imitation.

According to (Díaz & Díaz, 2013), they explained that meme has experienced an evolution to the development of technology in modern age. The concept of meme combines between image and statement. This combination results jokes, self-expression, allusion, and so on which becomes trend popular.

Paull (2009) states that "a meme can be a dance, a tune, an image, a phrase, or a word. For this example I am choosing the word "organic" as it is used in organic food, organic farming, organic fibres etc., to mean produced without synthetic fertilizers or pesticides". From Paull's example, it can be said that meme clearly gives an information of meaning of something and has ideas as a content.

From all theories presented, it can be concluded that meme is a cultural transmission or trend popular replicator. Meme accommodates a room for person to put an idea, and spread it into public.

3. Methodology

This paper uses descriptive qualitative and library research method. The writers searched the data at www.9gag.com site and took Spongebob meme randomly. The theories guide the writers in analyzing the meaning of Spongebob meme.

There are several procedures in analyzing the data. Firstly, data of statements and pictures are separated. The statements will be identified and analyzed based on rules of cooperative principles and rules of four maxims based on Grice. This is committed to find out any existing violations of maxims. It is included a types of maxims violation.

Secondly, the pictures data will be analyzed by using rules of sign theory of semiotic based on Richard and Ogden. It will investigate signs which are existed on the pictures by using Triangle of Semiotic concept. This step will give an information of the pictures. The sign itself is not only about pictures, but it is also included about words and expressions used on the statements within the meme.

After knowing the information from each statement and picture, the writers tries to figure out whether the combination of both of them can result in another violation of maxim. The next step is relating the violations of maxims occurring on the statements with information from the pictures which has investigated by using Semiotic Triangle concept. In accordance to the rules of four maxims, the violations happening on the meme will cause the occurrence of implicature. It is an implication of what the speaker say.

From all steps which has committed, the meaning of Spongebob meme will be able known. The meanings of Spongebob meme are concluded based on previous analysis process and it is also concluded by using inference theory.

4. Results and Discussion

There was one datum in this discussion. It was analysed based on method and procedures which had been explained and analysis was committed by using relevant theories. As the result, all theories had each role on this analysis. Those gave contribution to find out the invisible meaning of Spongebob meme as the data. For supporting this result, the implementations of them were discussed on the data.

Datum 1:



A. The statement

From the statement above, it can be seen that it has no highly clarity. This statement "Me when I'm with other guys and they're talking about girls" describes the subject "Me", and the next sentence describes about the situation of "Me". Based on the context of this statement, its essence is about an event of "Me", but the action of "Me" becomes a missing thing. It is an obscurity point of this statement. Based on rules of four maxims, it has opposite with the rule of maxim of manner which

suggest that an utterance or statement should be in high level of clarity. This can be said that this statement has violated *maxim of manner*.

B. The picture

The next step is investigating symbols of this meme. The picture above presents Spongebob as meme character. It describes that he is being on certain situation. He is sitting down and showing his expression, and there is a glass of hot water in front of him. From this description, it can be drawn some symbols of it.

1. The first symbol is Spongebob character. Based from the context of the statement, it can be said that Reference of him means a boy, adult male or teenager. The referent of Spongebob indicates to Real boy, adult male, or teenager as the result of Thought. This can be related with reality.
2. The second symbol is located on the expression showed by spongebob. It can be seen that he presents a shyness feeling. This feeling can be strengthened by gesture of his hands. It holds to be one such generally shy person. Based on context of the statement and social, this symbol causes the thought to refer a sadness as its reference. His shyness describes his sadness. The referent of this case is real teenager which is showing sadness expression.
3. The meme picture also shows a place that placed by Spongebob. It can be seen that there are red chairs and table which is dominated by Spongebob. This become a setting of this meme. From that description, it can be concluded that this place can be identified as symbol. It can be described as restaurant, cafe, or other. In social context, those become a famous place for adult people to spend the time. For this case, it can be said that the place is hang out place as its reference. Relating to the reality of hang out place as its referent. The places which is often visited by teenagers.
4. After identified the place of this meme, the last symbol is existed on a glass of hot water. It is clearly seen that there is a smoke above the glass. It means that there is hot water on the glass. Based on context of previous analysis, it can be said as coffee. In social and adult context, coffee is a famous drinking when people hang out with their friends. It has been a familiar thing. From this case, it can be said that this symbol (Coffee) means to hang out action. This symbol strengthens the situation of spongebob which is presented on this meme. The phenomena of coffee as means of hang out action is an object for its referent.

C. Relevancy between statement and picture

Furthermore, combining between the statement and the picture of this meme. From both of them which are showed on this meme, they have no relevancy between them. The statement tells that Spongebob with his guys, but the picture shows Spongebob sit alone. Secondly, the statement that tells his guys talking about girls has no connection with shyness expression of Spongebob. This disconnection can be concluded by following question *does talking about girls is a painful thing or something wrong?* Based on rules of four maxims, it is not following the rule of relation. It violates *maxim of relation*. In the rule of maxim of relation, it must be relevant.

Based on violation of maxims and also identification of Semiotic Triangle which have been committed, it can be said that the statement "Me when I'm with other guys and they're talking about girls" is about expression of lonely guy. This meme tells about psychological situation of subject "Me" that refers to Spongebob picture. As previous analysis of Semiotic triangle, Spongebob means a boy, adult male, or teenager. The symbols of the place and coffee describe that he is hanging out with his guys.

D. Implicature

Based on Grice Theory, the violations of maxims arise implicature. The violations which is showed on this meme make it has implicature. The implication of this meme is an illustration of lonely guy's expression when he is hanging out with his guys, and he cannot join on their topic (girls). The symbol and reference of Spongebob's expression strengthen a meaning that he has no girlfriend with the result he cannot join the conversation. He feel sad, but he doesn't want to show it. He covers it by presenting shyness toward his guys. It can be concluded that this meme implicates like utter *I am shy because I have no girlfriend*.

E. Inference

From the analysis result above and following the theory of inference, it can be said that this meme describes a teenager context. The meaning of this meme can be concluded as *an allusion which has a satire for lonely boys*. A satire is taken from picture of Spongebob. As people know, Spongebob is a foolish and funny character. It becomes a humor nuance of this meme.

To summarize, the analysis of Spongebob meme taken from website <https://imgflip.com/i/114exf> can be described in the following table:

Violation of Maxims		Quantity	Quality	Relation	Manner
				√	√
		Symbol	Reference	Referent	
		Spongebob	Boy	Boys	
		Shyness	Sad	Sadness boys	
Semiotic Triangle		Restaurant or café	Hangout place	Hangout place	
		A glass of hot water	Coffe	Hangout	
Meaning	Implicature	An illustration of lonely boy		I am shy because I have no girlfriend	
	Inference	An allusion which has a satire for lonely boys			

5. Conclusion

From this discussion, it can be concluded that these Spongebob meme has an expression and allusion toward phenomenon in the real life. Spongebob meme is used as media of illustration for teasing currently people. This discussion provided a comprehensive description of Grice's maxims and implicature in communication process although nonverbal communication. It was also giving a comprehension about Richard and Ogden's Semiotic Triangle in interpreting symbol. This discussion was only a bit example of those theories implementation in finding out a meaning.

Some points that may be received are that meme is one of ways to express what they feel, how their condition and criticize the condition around them in different way. Because meme contains humor, so it seems more polite than using satire sentence. Sponge bob meme as one of famous meme's character has many lesson for life. Implicitly, the lesson from spongebob meme is the representation of human being as social creature that needs other human to communicate and to share anything. The writers hope that for future research, it can applied in different subject, like advertisement of product or service. Analyzing about meme also can be elaborated using psychological course, to uncover psychological condition of the meme.

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