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The Role of Schemata in Interpreting Some Certain Texts

Sukirmiyadi Ahmad^{1*}

¹ Universitas Pembangunan Nasional "Veteran" Jawa Timur Jalan Raya Rungkut Madya, Gunung Anyar-Surabaya, Indonesia

^{*} Sukirmiyadi Ahmad, Universitas Pembangunan Nasional "Veteran" Jawa Timur Jalan Raya Rungkut Madya, Gunung Anyar-Surabaya, Indonesia

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Abstract

Some certain texts either written or spoken are sometimes very difficult to understand and interpret. This might happen if the readers or hearers do not have any experience or background knowledge about the texts to be interpreted. To make it clear, this paper aims at discussing the problems dealing with the role of schemata in interpreting some certain texts related to written and spoken texts. Concerning with individual's experience or background knowledge of the texts, we then realize that everybody of us or a group of people has their own background knowledge which is different between one person and another, one group of people and another. These facts more often might make them interpret the texts differently based on their own experiences or background knowledge. This different interpretation is due to the different background knowledge or schemata of the readers or hearers, to whom the text is directed. In line with this problem, to avoid misunderstanding and misinterpreting between the two persons or community having different background knowledge or schemata, here are several special texts to discuss and analyze as it was stated by Michael Mc. Carthy (1991), such as: a) Public Notice, b) Headlines of Article on the Newspaper, c) Some Peaces of Small Ads, d) Short Dialogues in Public Services, and e) the Term "Jamu" in Javanese Culture were discussed in this paper. Based on the data analysis, it could be concluded that schemata were required much in efforts to understand and interpret both written and spoken texts correctly.

Keywords

Schemata, background knowledge, interpreting, text

1. Introduction

Schemata can be seen as the well-organized background knowledge which leads us to expect or predict aspects in our interpretation of discourse (Brown & Yule, 1983). Meanwhile, he (1976) said that schema (singular) or schemata (plural) are any kind of experience or knowledge of the world obtained which is kept in someone's memory with many other knowledge of the world, and those experiences or background knowledge will be retrieved any time when they are required. Based on those two definitions, it might be assumed that schemata are the representation of certain things or knowledge that we have obtained and known which are kept in our brain or memory to be recalled someday. Later when there is a certain text or statement related to, that information will be required to interpret the new text. To interpret in this context means any activity aiming at bringing about comprehension (Riccardi, 2002, p. 56). Furthermore, Larson (1984, p. 32) said that the meaning of text was influenced by the communication situation: by who the speaker was, the audience, the traditions of culture, etc.

In line with the statements above, the term or the contraction of "TPA" in Indonesia for example, might be interpreted into several ways or interpretations, such as: "Taman Pendidikan Al-Qur'an, Tempat Pembuangan Akhir sampah, Tempat Penitipan Anak and Tugas Perancangan Arsitektur". The four different interpretations are as follows: (a) TPA for "Taman Pendidikan Al-Qur'an" is a place to learn holy Qur'an. This term is usually used by the learners learning Holy Qur'an, their teacher and their parents; (b) TPA for *Tempat Pembuangan Akhir sampah is* a central area where trash or rubbish from different places are collected at the same location; (c) TPA for Tempat Penitipan Anak is a place where especially the carreer women put their children the whole day while they are working; (d) TPA for Tugas Perancangan Arsitektur" is a Task of Architectural Design. This term is usually used by the students majoring in architectural engineering, their friends and their lecturers. These different interpretations are due to the different background knowledge or schemata of the readers or hearers, to whom the text is directed. Furthermore, when we read a statement in one massmedia several years ago: "Beberapa Ayam Hartono ditangkap" (Jawa Pos, 2000) as the head line on some local newspapers several years ago, probably not all people (readers) could directly be capable of interpreting well what the real meaning of the word "ayam" in that statement was. They might think that the word "ayam" was a chicken as it was meant in the dictionary as a lexical meaning. So, the statement above might be interpreted as "some chickens owned by Hartono was captured or caught". But if the readers had already got their background knowledge about it, they would not interpret as it was stated above because the word "ayam" in that context had an implied meaning. Such that statement was quite popular and familiar to the Surabayanese people. This headline was written especially in some local newspapers published in Surabaya. At that time, Hartono was known as a person who had an illegal sexual trade. He kept many young beautiful ladies in his house in Surabaya, and sold them to the men who needed sexual satisfaction with a very high price. Therefore, it could be inferred that the implied meaning of "ayam" in that context was not a kind of animal called "ayam" (chicken) but some ladies of sexual workers who worked for Hartono were captured by the police.

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that whoever (the readers) would not be capable of understanding and interpreting that statement correctly if they did not have any experience or background knowledge about the case or the news that had already been published previously in the same newspapers or any other information from other sources. Otherwise, they would not know what the implied meaning of the word "*ayam*" in that context. Therefore, not all people could understand and interpret what was meant by the writer except those who had already got a certain background knowledge of the world in advance or schemata about it that had already been kept in their memory. Finally, when they knew something related about, those schemata were used as their guidance to lead them to catch the new text or information by connecting the previous and the current information which are closely related each other to interpret the new text.

Dealing with the experience or the well-organized background knowledge of the world, of course every person, every group of people or community has their own experiences or background knowledge of the world. Therefore, the experiences, and background knowledge of the world that they have obtained must have been different between one person and another, one group of people and another, one area and another, because all of these differences are very closely related to the differences in social groups where they live and stay (Lehmann, 1976). As a consequent, by using their own schemata, they often interpret one thing or text differently even though the problem, event or the object to interpret is exactly the same. The word "balon" for example, might be interpreted not only as the real "balloon" as it is stated in the dictionary as a lexical meaning but also "bakal calon" (the future candidate), for Pilkada election and "prostitute", for Surabaya and East Java people. The other example, the word "PR" can also be interpreted into several other meanings. If this term is used in University or College areas among lecturers, staff, and students and some certain businesses, "PR" is interpreted as a contraction for Pembantu Rektor (Deputy Rector) or Public Relation. Meanwhile, "PR" is meant as "Pekerjaan *Rumah*" if this term is used by elementary up to secondary or high school students. Moreover, in another institution or organization, "PR" is interpreted as a contraction for "Pimpinan Rayon", and so on.

Furthermore, Brown and Yule (1982, p. 248) said that different cultural backgrounds can result in different schemata for the description of witnessed events. For example, the two different cultural backgrounds between the people from Central Java and East Java. The word "*edan*" (crazy) is often used by the people from Central Java to express the closeness, compliment, cheerfulness, and astonishment between the two close friends who (probably) have not seen each other for a long time. They would rather say: "*Edan tenan, kowe saiki wis dadi wong sugih, bojo ayu, omah gedhe, montore akeh pisan*" (you are really such a crazy man of being successful, with a beautiful wife, big and well-furnished house, and also have many cars). Meanwhile, the East Java people (Surabaya) would rather use the word "*Jancok*" or "*Jangkrik*" instead of "*Edan*". So, the expression above might become:

"Jancok" or "Jangkrik" temen, kon/awakmu saiki wis dadi wong sogih, bojo ayu, omah gedhe, montore akeh pisan". They might not tolerate with the word "edan" in this context, as what they have kept in their schemata that the word "edan" is interpreted as "crazy" or "mad", not others.

2. The Relationship between Schemata, Discourse Analysis and Text Interpretation

Schemata are closely related to discourse analysis. Discourse analysis or analysis of discourse is the analysis of language in use (Brown & Yule, 1984). Concerning with the language in use, we have to deal with such a certain rule of language to make one utterance or statement that we produce is closely related each other to make it understandable. Therefore, schemata are required by both the speaker and hearer (spoken discourse), or between the writer and reader (written discourse) so that they will be capable of interpreting the text correctly. Thus, it can be inferred that discourse analysis can be used to draw attention to the skill required to put the language rules into action to achieve successful communication.

As we know that the context of language, discourse can be divided into two parts: spoken and written discourse. However, spoken discourse is usually less planned and more open to intervention by the hearer or listener than writer discourse. In spoken discourse, the listener can respond, interrupt, or ask immediately to the speaker when the utterance is neither clear nor understandable, as well as makes the listener disagree, and so on. While written discourse, in contrast, is more planned, this is due to the fact that in writing, the writer conveys the message without the presence of the reader. Therefore, the writer is demanded to write as clearly as possible to make the message (what the writer is writing about) understandable.

Furthermore, Mukminatien quoted from Hartfiel (1985) said that the writer has also to consider three essential elements to produce a piece of good writing covering the subject (topic), the purpose (the reason to write), and the audience (the reader). Obviously, the ability to produce a good piece of writing is facilitated by the knowledge of how to connect sentences to present unified thought. This requires the application of one of the writer's communicative competence which is called discourse competence. Therefore, each piece of writing should consist of a set of sentences that constitute a text. While the set of sentences to constitute a text depends on the cohesive relationships within between sentences which create texture (Brown & Yule, 1983).

In line with understanding some certain texts, Mukminatien (quoted from Savignon, 1983) said that to understand the function served by a particular grammatical structure can only be done by looking at language in use or in its context of situation as the existence of linguistic link in a text helps the readers understand the message more easily. Meanwhile, a text in this context is defined as a unit of language in use, and it is not a grammatical unit but a semantic one. Therefore, more often the writer or the speaker does not always have to produce the statement or utterance completely instead of having some parts of it, however, it is still understandable and meaningful. Thus, the role of schema or schemata are absolutely required to be able to interpret any kind of text which is omitted here and there whether it is consciously or unconsciously to make it as simple as possible but still communicative. Meanwhile, to interpret or interpreting as what it was stated by Riccardi (2002) is any activity which aims at bringing how a person comprehends a text well. What someone has to comprehend here is a text, either written or spoken. Moreover, to comprehend one text in efforts to be capable of interpreting it more easily and correctly, someone has to own some schemata or background knowledge about it before interpreting the new text.

It had already been proved that the schemata as a theory on remembering was taken up by many psycholinguists as a device which was able to have them in understanding the process of interpretation of a text in human's brain. It turns out in the process of understanding, man does not only involve knowledge of language but also knowledge of the world. For example, when people or customers want to buy a gasoline in the gas station, we will see how short and simple their dialogue is:

The clerk: "Berapa?", instead of "berapa liter bensin Anda mau beli?"

The buyer: "Tiga", instead of "saya mau beli tiga liter bensin".

Even in the next transaction when the clerk receives the money and gives the change to the buyer, there is no communication at all between them.

3. Discussion

There are many kinds of different texts in discourse analysis related to the schemata in efforts to understand some certain texts from which we can analyze to be interpreted through the help of our scheme or schemata. According to Michael Mc. Carthy (1991, p. 148), some special texts to include were such as: instruction leaflet, letter to/from a friend, public notice, product label, newspaper obituary, poem, news report, small ads, business letter, etc. Nevertheless, in this article the writer only took some examples of them in accordance with special texts covering public notice, some headlines of article on the newspapers, some pieces of small ads, some short dialogues in public services, and the term *"jamu*" or *"jampi*" in Javanese culture.

3.1 Public Notice

We often see many kinds of public notices that are written in such a way that they can really attract whoever sees them. They are usually placed in some strategic place where many people usually pass by, so that the message will exactly come to reach the target people whom the public notices are for. Here are some examples:

(a) "*Ngebut Benjut*": This notice is usually placed in front of the small streets of kampoeng areas where many small children of the community play or do another activity. The notice is usually directed to the cyclists and drivers who pass by those streets. They are reminded not to drive so fast that endangers everybody in that area and may cause an accident happen. If they do so and it happens that they hit people live there, they will be judged according to the community's own way of judgment;

(b) "*Ngamen Gratis*": Nowadays, we are often annoyed by the existence of street musicians (pengamen jalanan) coming to our houses for some of money. Even, in one day more than four street musicians do come either alone or in a group. To avoid this, usually the chief of kampong (ketua RT) approved by the community decides to put such a notice in the front gate of each street, or even on each house. It seems that the notice like this is quite effective because all of the street musicians have already known that the notice like that one is directed to them not to come to that area playing their music any longer except they are willing to play their music and sing with no money at all;

(c) "*Matikan Rokok Anda atau Rokok Mematikan Anda*" (Put out your cigarette or it will kill you). Everybody knows about the danger of smoking cigarettes, and it has already been known widely that many victims of death are caused by some serious disease as the bad impact of smoking cigarettes. However, many of the smokers still do continue smoking and never think about the effect of it. Therefore, the physicians and medical doctors who know well about the real cases of the victims are trying hard to remind the smokers not to smoke any longer before the death comes as the effect of smoking cigarettes. They usually put this notice in front of their practice rooms or any other medical clinics where most of their patients can see and read.

3.2 Some Headlines of Article on the Newspaper

More often in newspapers, a journalist wants to say one thing that might mean another. This sometimes makes the readers quite hard to interpret them correctly without any background knowledge or schemata about. Therefore, the readers should be provided with enough background knowledge related to the new topicor text to interpret if they want to know the implied meaning what the writer means and wants to say. Here are some examples:

(a) "Perang Bintang" di Pilgub Jakarta (Jawa Pos, September 24, 2016).

The key word of the statement above is on "*Perang Bintang*". The word "*bintang*" here was not the real star shining in the sky at night. What the writer wanted the readers to know was that there were three future governors of DKI Jakarta to be elected and three of them were very popular and well known for Indonesian people. They were described as shining stars. Those three people were Ahok, the current governor of DKI Jakarta, Anies Baswedan, the ex-minister of Education and the third was Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono, the first son of the two-period ex-president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (2004-2014). They will compete in the Governor's election of DKI Jakarta in the period of 2017-2022.

(b) Indonesia "Cukur" Malaysia 3-0 (Metro TV News, September 07, 2016).

The lexical meaning of the word "*cukur*" (in Indonesian) is "to shave" (in English). The head line above was dealing with the football or soccer competition between Indonesia and Malaysia. Therefore, the word "*cukur*" in the text above did not mean "to shave" our hair but connoting with "defeated".

(c) *Kerja Keras Redam "Titik Panas*" (Working hard for putting out the Hot Spot: Jawa Pos, August 28, 2016).

Recently, several provinces of Indonesia especially Sumatra and Kalimantan (during the dry season) got a serious problem with forest fires. Almost every year, several areas of these two islands got serious forest fires. The impact of fires in fact did not only affect to Indonesian country but also to Singapore and Malaysia. Even the forest fire happened in Sumatra last year (in 2015) was said as "the smoke emergency" because the impact of it was very serious. Many schools were closed for more than a month and many public services like airport could not be operated and many people were reported to have some diseases, such as dealing with their respiration problem. Therefore, when the fire happened in the following year (in August 2016), Indonesian government was soon working very hard to stop or put out the fire spot or fire centre before the fire spreaded to some other areas.

(d) "*Satu Dekade Berlumur Lumpur*" (Within One decade, one area in East Java Province has been covered with Mud: Jawa Pos, May 29, 2016).

Almost all of Indonesian people, especially those of East Java knew very well that in one region of Kabupaten Sidoarjo, there had been hot mud containing smelly gas coming out from the earth since ten years ago (started from 2006) which had not stopped yet at the present time (in 2016). Many houses, schools and many other buildings like factories were buried in the earth with the hot mud. Therefore, the area affected and covered by the hot mud was getting more and wider.

(e) "*Cendana Bingung, Pansus Tak Terpengaruh*" (Cendana was very upset while the Special Committee were not influenced: Jawa Pos, January 7, 2001). The implied meaning of this statement to interpret was concentrated on the words meant. "*Cendana*" referred to Soeharto our ex-president and his family who lived on Jln. Cendana Jakarta. While "*Pansus*" was the contraction for "Panitia Khusus" (Special Committee) that was assigned to handle the case of KKN (Corruption, Collusion, and Nepotism) done by Soeharto and his family.

(f) *Sapuan Tantang Suwondo* "*Buka-bukaan*" *di DPR* (Jawa Pos, October 21, 2000): the public readers in general had already known who Sapuan and Suwondo were. Therefore, they could directly interpret what the implied meaning of "*buka-bukaan*" in that context was. Sapuan and Suwondo were the two persons who were getting involved in the case of fund misusing of Yayasan Dana Sejahtera in Bulog. While "*buka-bukaan*" was a kind of debate which was ready to be done directly and openly to show who was to be blamed and who was in the right position in that case.

3.3 Some Pieces of Small Ads

We also often find it difficult to interpret some certain utterances or texts that have implied meaning in some commercial advertisements that are usually spoken or written in a short way but meaningful. However, with the help of our schemata, we will be able to interpret them easily and correctly. Here are some examples:

(a) "How Low Can You Go". Before reading this statement, we have already got our background

knowledge that the relationship between one cigarette product being advertised and the words "low" and "go" is the content inside the cigarette. It has already been known that the nicotine and tar from which the smoker sucks endanger the people's health. Therefore, to reduce the serious risk of smoking cigarettes, the producer promotes his product by exposing such those words to tell the smokers not to be so worried to continue smoking as the nicotine and tar inside the cigarettes are very low. Thus, it is expected that smokers will be a bit relieved with the information in that context, and are not so worried any longer to keep smoking the same cigarette as the effect of it is not as dangerous as any other products.

(b) "*Pakai Hitam, Siapa Takut?*". This statement was used by one of the shampoo products on television. It was said that this brand of shampoo could remove dandruff from the head's scalp of the users. In general, when we have some dandruff on our head's scalp, it will drop easily when we comb our hair. This may cause our clothes dirty, especially when we wear a dark or black color. Therefore, the implied meaning of this advertisement is that everybody should not be afraid or not to be worried any longer to wear black clothes if they have already cleaned their hair with the shampoo product being advertised.

(c) "*Karena Hidup Bukanlah Beban*". In this advertisement, life was described as a snail that carried its shell on its back. It seemed that what this animal brought on its back was too heavy to carry. However, it still kept continue moving although very slowly. Thus, the message that the producer wanted the audience to know was that having drunk or consumed the product being advertised, the consumers or people would find everything they did become very light and easy, no matter how hard or heavy their work was.

3.4 Short Dialogues in Public Services

In our daily life, short dialogues are commonly used in public communication, such as in the market between the buyer and seller, on the bus between the conductor and passenger, in the bank between the teller and the customer, and many others. Here are some examples:

(a) In the Market: (between the buyer and seller)

Buyer: "Apelnya berapa?" (How much is the apple?), instead of "Bu saya mau beli apel yang anda jual, berapa harga perkilonya?" (Madam, I'm buying the apple that you are selling. How much does it cost each kilogram?)

Seller: "Sepuluh ribu", instead of "Kalau Anda mau beli apel, saya menjual sepuluh ribu perkilonya. Apa anda mau?".

Buyer: "ya"

Seller: (the seller weighs the apple, wraps and gives it to the buyer)

Buyer: (the buyer gives Rp.10.000, to the seller)

(b) On the Bus: (between the conductor and passenger)

Passenger: "Malang tiga berapa?" (How much to Malang for three people?), instead of "Pak, kami

bertiga dari Surabaya mau pergi ke Malang. Berapa rupiah kami harus membayar?" (Sir, three of us are from Surabaya going to Malang. How much money should we pay?).

Conductor: "Lima belas ribu" (Fifteen thousand rupiahs), instead of "*Ongkos perjalanan dari Surabaya ke Malang satu orangnya lima ribu rupiah. Jadi untuk tiga orang Anda harus membayar tiga kali lima ribu, lima belas ribu rupiah"*. (The trip fare from Surabaya to Malang each person is Five thousand Rupiahs, so three of you have to pay three times five thousand, it should be fifteen thousand *rupiahs*).

Passenger: (the passenger gives Rp.20.000)

Conductor: (the conductor gives Rp.5.000, - for the change to the passenger)

(c) At the Bank: (between the teller and customer)

Teller: "Saudara Enggo"

Customer: "ya"

Teller: (She gives the passbook and some money that Enggo wants to withdraw)

Customer: (Enggo comes to see the teller to take his passbook and money that he withdraws)

Based on the examples of dialogue above we can see how quite short and very simple they are. Even in the last two lines of those three kinds of different dialogues, there is no communication at all even though the transaction is still going on.

3.5 The Term "Jamu" or "Jampi" in Javanese Culture

In Javanese culture, there are so many terms of the same words that have different meaning and function. One of them is *"Jamu" or "Jampi"*. Here are some examples:

(a) Between "jamu" seller and her customers

The word *"jamu or jampi"* in this contect is the real *jamu* that means herbal medicine which can cure a certain desease.

Seller: "Jampi, bu?", instead of "Bu, saya menjual jamu, apa ibu mau beli?" (Madam. I'm selling jamu, do you want to buy some?

Customer: "*Prei*" (*Free/no*), instead of "*Saya biasanya suka minum jamu dan membeli jamu yang kamu jual, tapi sekarang sedang tidak ingin membeli dan minum jamu*" (Usually the customer buys and drinks *the jamu/jampi* but at that moment, due to some certain reason, s/he does not want to buy and drink it)

The word "jampi" in this context is the real jamu that can make us healthy.

(b) Between grandmother and her grandson

Grandmother : "Ojo nakal nakal, tak jamoni mengko"

Grandson :...

The word "*tak jamont*" in this context does not refer to the real jamu as the example given previously, but it is usually used by the Central Java People of old generation to frighten or threaten the small children due to the fact that they usually reject to drink "*jamu*" because they know that *jamu* is not

something nice to drink or consume.

(c) Between the Two (Close) Friends or Relatives

Johan: "Suwe ora jamu"

Margono :

The word "*jamu*" in this context is an expression of happiness between the two close friends or relatives who have not seen each other for a long time, and suddenly without making any appointment, they can meet in one occasion, or one of them comes to visit.

(d) Other example

Jono: "Bapak iku lho, wis sepuh kok isih tongseng wae, jamune opo?"

The word "jamu" in this context refers to "the recipe" that makes him look healthy and strong. So, the interpretation of this statement is "that man has already been old enough but he still looks so strong and healthy; what recipe that makes him so?" (What kind of meal or food that he has consumed to maintain his health and strength).

4. Conclusion

Some certain texts either spoken or written are not easy to understand and interpret because they more often have their implied meanings. Either the writer or speaker often omits some parts of his utterances or statements in efforts to make it simpler and more efficient but meaningful. However, with the help of adequate schemata or background knowledge, supported with some other experience, situation, culture, educational background, social community surroundings where we lived and stayed, finally we would be capable of interpreting any kind of text more easily and correctly. Therefore in our daily life, there were so many kinds of texts to be interpreted in a various way based on their own experiences or background knowledge. Several texts to be the examples in this paper were covering public notice, some headlines of article on the newspaper, some pieces of small ads, short dialogues, and the use of term "jamuC" or "jampi" in Javanese culture.

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