# Contention of Meaning in WhatsApp Cultural Group: A Semantic Cognitive Analysis

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#### **Abstract**

The discourse of interpersonal communication in social media group contains of turn adjacency and simultaneous feedback of communication. Especially in WhatsApp group, the model of communication constructs a discourse by using a certain ideological mode through linguistic features. The communication model in the WhatsApp group involves participants directly, so that it is analyzed through mental and cognition with the semantic aspects that participants use. This study aims to reveal the contention of meaning in WhatsApp group by using cognitive semantic analysis. Cognitive semantic analysis is used to examine social cognition that affects contention of meaning among participants in the group. Contention of meaning in WhatsApp group communication is analyzed in three aspects; (1) the underlying social cognition, (2) the scheme of meaning in the group, and (3) the effects of the interaction scheme. The identification of semantic elements in interpersonal communication is based on microstructure analysis of van Diik's model i.e., linguistic features, such as background, coherence, detail, lexicon, pronominal, and graphic elements. Based on the research findings, the dominant aspect of social cognition that underlying participants in WhatsApp group communication are knowledges, attitudes, opinions, and concerns of the group members. The contention scheme of meaning in groups produces a discourse interaction model that tends to overlap and be structured. Effects that arose from the contention of meaning is ideological dominative groups and spread of knowledge on the topic of debate on all members of the group. This study reinforces the necessity of ideological construction through the contention of meaning in cognitive semantic studies and critical discourse especially in computer-mediated discourse analysis.

# **Keywords**

virtual communication cognitive semantics microstructure WhatsApp group

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# Introduction

Virtual communication scope is growing specifically in the globalization era. It caused by an emergence of consciousness toward the urgency of language use. Because of the virtual nature itself, language achieves transformation both in terms of form and function (Crystal, 2004 & Hoed, 2014). Through the influence of the reciprocal, the language use in virtual communication scope implicated to the various disciplines. Furthermore, it most developed by the experts from various perspectives, such as *Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC)* (Ceron, 2015; Dahlberg, 2001; Herring, 2004) which focus on interpersonal interactions by computer network mediation or *Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA)*. It involves communication elements in technology era both written and spoken form (LeVin & Scollon, 2004; Machin, 2013). The studies have a relationship with a big concept of *Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)* as linguistic studies which focus on individual language use or society in various dimensions, included in the current condition namely virtual communication era.

The virtual communication scope studies have its own peculiarities when compared to non-virtual communication. Non-virtual communication more common through a discourse mode orally (spoken discourse) and an adjustable interaction pattern (Fairclough, 1989; Kusumanegara, 2016), while a virtual communication involves any form and require public participation, freedom of expression, and equal power relations occurred convivially and freely for the users (Herring, p 626; Saifullah, 2017, p 311). Therefore, virtual communication studies have extended discourse. In that context, virtual communication application studies included WhatsApp become a trend in linguistic studies.

A lot of theoretical studies on WhatsApp have been done. As an example, a WhatsApp's real function elaboration toward minorities (Calvo & Carbonell, 2017), WhatsApp group communication has influenced to the mass criticism development and the new forms of social interaction (Ling, 2017), also the Postgraduate Student competence development in discourse studies by using WhatsApp application (Perez-Sabater, 2015). From various studies and researches on WhatsApp communication use, it can be stated that WhatsApp has contributed to linguistic studies, and also became the most interesting scope for language researchers.

Empirically, WhatsApp is one of the virtual communication network provisioning applications that is quite representative and globalized. Reviewed by its medium side (Herring, 2001: p 615), WhatsApp include in CMD synchronous, even by one-way transmission or two-way transmission. This social media application has its own peculiarities when compared to other social media applications, namely chat and group-based. Unlike communication services such as phone/text messages (Call/SMS) that only generate interpersonal communication (side by side calls), WhatsApp provides a group communication feature that allows individuals with multiinterpersonal communication (multiside calls). It is represented in the group conversation feature provided within the application.

In its use, WhatsApp group generates discourse interaction because each participant gets information directly from the other participants. The message or meaning that conveyed becomes information source or subsequently to be discourse sources. As Campbell (2014) and Herring (2004) have pointed out, in the context of social media/computer-mediated communication, there are social consequences that can be examined. In a group conversations interaction sequences are available and accessible to the all members. The consequences are also contained in WhatsApp communication (Ling, 2017).

The communication situation in WhatsApp cultural group is reviewed using cognitive reviews because the WhatsApp communication model directly involved the participants. The language use in that context is most influenced by aspects of cognition. The semantic approach assumes that language is a mental form and linguistic ability supported by a special form of knowledge (Saeed, 2016). As it is known that semantics can be used as a discipline that can provide a high level of differentiation of an object research. As the results of research by Sutarman & Hanafi (2020) which states that the demonstrative in certain languages may be the same

syntactically, but different semantically. Thus, it needs a study to see the communication in the WhatsApp group as a meaningful contention of meaning (a semantic analysis) among individuals or groups ideologically.

# Method

This research used qualitative approach. Specifically, it categorized into a type of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) study that combines van Dijk cognition analysis (2008/2009), cognitive semantic indicator from Allan (2001), also equipped with Computer Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) (Herring, 1999; 2004). Social cognition analysis used to derive references that underlie the meaning produced in interaction by participants on the groups, while cognitive semantic indicators clarify the semantic categories produced by participants.

Van Dijk (2008/2009) classified the microstructures that represent semantic elements by considering linguistic features or elements; background, coherence, presupposition, detail, lexicon/diction, pronouns/nouns, and graphics. The identification results to the linguistic features in the speech data elaborated with cognitive semantic indicators or produced meanings from the participants. To obtain abstraction of conflicting meaning in interaction discourse, grounded theory procedures used which attempt to elicit constant comparison between data and emerging categories as well as theoretical sampling of different groups (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, this study does not result a generalization to the ownership or those who dominate in discourse. This study focuses on the conflicting meanings from an interpersonal communication in virtual context.

This study uses CMC concept to see the context of the communication situation and interaction management. It is referred to Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis as a virtual interaction analysis. For this research, it is on WhatsApp group communication. As developed by Herring (2004: p 4), there are some assumptions for underlying online discourse or virtual communication; (1) discourse exhibits recurrent patterns, (2) discourse involves speaker choices, and (3) discourse shaped by the technological features of computer-mediated communication systems. These three assumptions imply how the context of virtual communication or CMC occurs and give some consequences for CMDA in WhatsApp (see below, in result and discussion section).

The data sources of research are WhatsApp group communication either in the form of discussion, ordinary chat, or debate. To represent the data representative, we used data from 3 cultural groups in WhatsApp, each with different social and cultural contexts. The three of WhatsApp cultural groups used as discourse data sources are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Data Sources

No.	WhatsApp Group Name	Group Description	Member Quantity
1	IKA Himaprodi PBSI	Virtual communication scope for alumnus of Himaprodi PBSI Makassar State University. The alumni of this organization have diverse social backgrounds, such as lecturers, teachers, entrepreneurs, and students.	74
2	La Macca UPI	Virtual communication scope for students of Education University of Indonesia who come from South Sulawesi or who has been domiciled in South Sulawesi. The members of this group are graduated from university and some are still students.	87
3	S3 Linguistik UPI 2017	Virtual communication scope for doctoral students of linguistic department of Education University of Indonesia exponents 2017. The group discuss about academic culture intensely.	7

The groups taken as a discourse sources thought able to represent the contradiction of meaning in the WhatsApp group because the circulation of information or discussion in the group both can be global or local and even cultural. It is based on the WhatsApp virtual communications applications nature that can create multilingual,

multicultural, and multiideological communities ideally (Arbelaiz, Areizaga, & Camps, 2016; Calvo & Carbonell, 2017).

# **Results**

The study shows how the contradiction meaning produced by the participants appear in the WhatsApp group discourse interaction. The contradiction meaning within the group continuously become a contention meaning. It cannot be separated from the characteristics or CMC and online discourse assumptions. There are simultaneous feedback and turn adjacency which can produce a discourse interaction scheme (Herring, 1999).

The discussion topic strongly influenced by the role of social actors (participant cognition). Social cognition focused on the aspects of semantic microstructure that can represent contradiction meaning which contained language features. The flow of contention meaning can be seen in the following linguistic evidences.

Table 2. Example of Data in WhatsApp Cultural Groups

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Focus	Sub focus	Data	
Micro-structure of	Background	1. "Sahabatku sekalian yang berada di sekitar	
discourse/		Bandung Utara insya Allah SECAPA Angkatan	
Semantic features		Darat Bandung mengadakan acara Nonton	
		Bareng Film" [Group 2]	
		2. " Ini bukan soal targetan kemeriahan dengan	
		kuantitas peserta banyak, apalagi jika hanya	
		sekadar menampilkan ceremonial rutinan yang	
		tujuannya adalah kompetensi" [Group 1]	
	Coherencies	1. "Daftar nama yang Insya Allah akan ikut nobar G	
		30 S PKI." [Group 2]	
		2. "Ehm, jadi masa depan bergantung saya	
		nih./Broh, besok nginep d gw?" [Group 3]	
	Preposition	1. "Daftar nama yang Akan ikut nobar PSM vs	
		Gresik" [Group 2]	
		2. "You must agree, unless you want to present on	
		Monday alone/emoji ⊚ " [Group 3]	
	Detail	<ol> <li>"insya Allah SECAPA Angkatan Darat Bandung</li> </ol>	
		mengadakan acara Nonton Bareng Film G 30 S	
		PKI pada hari sabtu, 30 September 2017 pukul	
		19.30 wib s/d selesai bertempat di lapangan	
		SECAPA AD Hegarmanah Bandung," [Group 2]	
	Lexical	1. "Baguslah nonton Film Dokumenter Jagal dan	
		Senyap juga kak." ⊚ [Group 2]	
		"Sangat setuju" (emoji jempol) [Group 3]	
	Pronominal	1. "FA, MPP, NRA, MFM" (participant initial) [Group	
		2]	
		2. Mending Selasa aja mas A." [Group 3]	
	Graphic Element	Infographics sent by participants of group [Group	
		2]	
		2. Infographics about Jusuf Kalla's wedding	
		statement. [Group 1]	

In table 2, the data indicates that the existence of contention from the conversations within the group. The discourse microstructures that contain the semantic features of the language use structure then it shows a cognition from participant's discourse. A language user as social actor has a social personality and cognition, they are memory, knowledge, and opinion in a meaning structure that will be shared with other group members/participants of discourse automatically (Allan, 2001; van Dijk, 2008).

The language use in a WhatsApp group is a dominative interactional communication. The Group members as participants discourse tend to dominate toward participants discourse by defending their own ideology. The ideology influenced by participants cognition which identified through their knowledge, shown attitudes, and achieved goals (van Diik, 2009).

In group 1, a participant (*Ah*) delivered a critical statement to the organizational policy conditions and that's show a background use. After more than 12 hours, a member of the group (*Ai*) sends graphic info containing Jusuf Kalla's discourse on marriage. Previously, 2 participants supported the first statement by sending emoji thumbs to the information given by *Ah*. On the other hand, *Ai*'s speech is supported by *Ey*. These two contradictory statements indicate a contradiction of meaning between the two parties. To conceal the discourse elaborated by *Ah*, *Ai* gives a new discourse, a statement that is entertaining and has a different topic from the statement of *Ah*.

In group 2, the theme discussed is two films that considered to be contradictory, it's film G30S/PKI and *Jagal dan Senyap*. Both films have the same theme but with a completely different storyline. Participant *Sa* wants the group participants to watch G30S/PKI. On the other hand, *Sb* has watched *Jagal dan Senyap* movies, so he has different knowledge about the events of 30 September 1965. *Sa* and *Sb* have different attitudes and goals. *Sa* is supported by *Rh* because has the same attitude, he encourages to watch G30S/PKI. By conveying different information, but still in same context and situation, *Mi* covered the disagreement between *Sa* cs and *Sb*. It is marked with the title of information "List of names that will come in watching cinema". *Mi* never watch *Jagal dan Senyap*, so that he made a contradiction information with different topics, by announced to watch a soccer match. The counter topics of information ultimately cover the information conveyed by *Sa*. The next turn adjacency shows that some of other group members returned to support Sa by continuing the text from *Rh*, while some other group participants supported *Sb* by continuing the text from *Mi*.

Group 3 has presentation agenda reschedule context from one of group members, because it adjusts the interests of the other group members. At the beginning of the interaction, there are 4 group members (Ys, Am, Mw, & Lz) agree the presentation to be postponed to another day. In response, Ak gave a confirmatory interrogative sentence to the four participants. Then Am immediately respond with questions that have no coherence with Ak confirmation. From the interaction between Am and Ak, so that Ak's interrogative sentence not addressed by other participants. Then Kw gave a statement that also covered the statement from Ak. In the second segment, Hz is a participant that has a neutral attitude due to the imperfection of information entered in its cognition. Then Mw gives information to Hz regarding the plan to postpone the presentation schedule from Ak, so that Hz can understand that it supports the dominant statement. Mw closes the interaction by giving reconfirmation to Hz that the presentation may not be postponed, if the presentation being attended and executed by Ak himself.

The speech data in WhatsApp group communication shows a continuous interactional communication and done in turn taking. This form of communication allows the emergence of social actor role that will produce a particular discourse. In message-based communication groups, there are developed dynamics because of their communications form is chat group and it's continuously based on the specific goals (Ling, 2017). The dynamics generates contention of meaning in WhatsApp group that has an active member.

The contention of meaning in WhatsApp group communication is reviewed in three aspects; (1) the underlying social cognition, (2) the conflicting scheme of meaning in the group, and (3) the effects of contention in WhatsApp group. These aspects are based on the level of interaction in CMC (Computer Mediated Discourse) which includes speech rotation, development topic, and interactive negotiation changes, as well as participants patterns (messages sent and received) in certain discourse conditions (Herring, 2004). *First*, the language features used represent the mental processes of each participant. The mental process is subjective construction and the realization of the communication situation (van Dijk, 169: 2006). *Second*, the interaction pattern produces a conflicting scheme of meaning in the communication group. It is a consequence of a particular system of technological features used (Herring, 2004). *Third*, the classification of the semantic elements contained in the language features has an effect on the discourse and the participants in the WhatsApp group. The structure of meaning derived from the knowledge gained and experienced (world view) reflects the purpose of communication participants/intentions (Allan, 2001, Saeed, 2016).

# **Discussion**

#### **Social Cognition Background**

The contention meaning in the WhatsApp group is strongly influenced by the social cognition that participants have. Social cognition, as van Dijk's theory (2008: p 88 & 2009: p 38—39), it can be from personal memories, goals, knowledges, attitudes, rules, and opinions, then intensions as well as those shared with the group

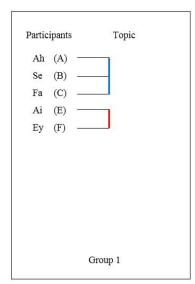
members or culture as a whole. That makes 'social representations' to evoke actions of a group. Thus, each participants have each social actor.

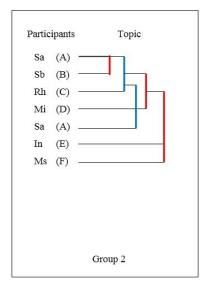
As described in the analysis segment, participants have and fought for their respective roles. Micro-social, the role is influenced by the personal memory, knowledge, opinion, and objective of the participants. Participants will speak according to their own cognition. Cognitively, language is informed by what human beings perceive in nature (particularly in relation to themselves) (Allan, 2001: p 318). Conversely, the result of speech will also affect the mind or cognition of other participants. If controlling discourse is the first major form of power, controlling people's mind is the other fundamental way to reproduce dominance and hegemony (van Dijk, 2008: p 91). In a social macro, the role affects and influenced by the type also condition of the group used as a social environment. As van Dijk (2006) formulated that the context can't be separated from the participant constructs. The participant's ejaculation is adjusted to the 'level' or characteristic of the group that follows.

Group 1 is a venue for alumni from a campus organization. Therefore, communication in the group dominated by information that familial, educative, and competition. Different social backgrounds make communication within the group display the cognition of each participant because each participant has different character and ideology in general. Almost, it happens in the same as group 2 which consists of students of a university, but also consists of the alumni of the university concerned. The difference is the interaction of discourse in group 2 tends to be dominated by students who are still active. Different conditions occur in group 3 because the participants are still active students, therefore the flow of communication is very active and lead to significant disagreements. The communication flow in the WhatsApp group can be seen in the next section.

#### Discourse Interaction Scheme

Particularly in the WhatsApp group communication, an interaction models among participants will produce a contention of meaning in the discourse through conversation topic and mutual social representation. As Herring said (1999) about the necessity of interactional coherence in virtual communication. It can be seen in the scheme of discourse interaction as Figure 1 below.





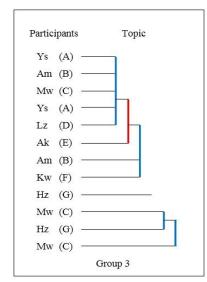


Figure 1. Scheme of WhatsApp discourse interaction in 3 groups

Based on the schemes, participants presented an information in the group about the implementation of some sources, such as films, information, and memes. For example, in group 2, *Sb* gives the cons of information that conveys the agenda of watching movie with *Jagal dan Senyap* and attaching a related information from online media. *Rh* then responds to the *Sb* information by attaching a list of members who agreed to go to watch G30S/PKI. With some different topics, *Mi* provides information about watching PSM vs Persegres. It triggers responses from other group members by filling out a willingness to watch PSM vs Persegres with emotive "laugh". The conversations and information are performed in rotation and show mutual reciprocity in the group. Description example from the scheme above shows a contention of meaning scheme in WhatsApp group.

As we can see at figure 1, discourse interaction scheme can lead monotonous interested parties and face to face (group 1). That is, clearly identifiable parties. The contention scheme of meaning can also lead to a rolling and enlarged path of opposition that can ultimately dominate a discourse (group 2). The contention of meaning can also occur between an individual with a big group who has many participants (group 3). This happens because WhatsApp is a personal contact-based app, so it's paying close attention to the role of each member in the group. In general, we can see the emergence of individuals or groups that are formed ideologically and fight for their respective meanings.

#### **Cultural Effect of Contention of Meaning**

The contention of meaning in the WhatsApp group has some effects on the group condition and on the participant directly. These effects are motivated by the diversity of social cognition and typical discourse interaction schemes in WhatsApp applications. As Herring explains (1999) that the design of CMC should has some impacts and implications.

*First*, the contention in the WhatsApp group implies a contention of cognition for every individual, thus involved psychological and cultural aspect. The neglect even denial towards the information provided by a participant leads to the social inequality. It come true because the information or 'posts' in the WhatsApp group are visible to all group members. It is classified as an attack on the participants cognition indirectly. The more extreme consequences are the group members left the group, if they can't follow or their cognition is not in accordance with a group's communications conditions. Or they will be silent readers because they recognize the culture of tolerance and mutual respect in Indonesian society.

Second, the contradiction of meaning in WhatsApp leads to inequality in the communication aspect. In contrast to spoken communication (face to face) which done directly, virtual communication tends to produce overlapping information from the intent statement because the meanings conveyed by participants tend not to be sufficient. Sometimes, discussions that occur do not have interactional coherence resulting in an imbalance of meaning. Furthermore, it will generate or drown a certain information.

Third, the contention of meaning is a conflict between individuals. A contention has the win concept consequences, loses, or draws. The participants who accept the concept of victory will have power within the group. Conversely, participants who accept the concept of defeat will be the dominant party. In general, the contention in the WhatsApp group has no benchmark of the concept of victory and defeat, as all participants are entitled to comment and perform their respective social roles. But the contention can happen continuously, so it sometimes raises the concept of the draw.

# Conclusion

This paper has examined the claim that the virtual communication in WhatsApp group is enhancing and extending the contention of rational-critical discourse as conceived by semantic cognitive. This examination has been carried out by comparing van Dijk's theory of social cognition, Allan's indicator of semantic cognitive, and Herring's scheme of online discourse. This collaboration has been undertaken at general level so as to cover extensive areas of cyber culture, a broad-ranging analysis achieved by drawing upon a diversity of virtual communication research, especially in WhatsApp research.

The evaluation shows that exchange of contention can be found to be taking place every day on thousand groups of WhatsApp. These communicative acts confirm that the WhatsApp group facilitating discourse that replicates the basic of rational-critical debate and that in various ways approximates the requirements of the contention of meaning. As such, we can say that the WhatsApp group facilitates an expansion of the contention of meaning that is constituted whenever people enter into communication. However, as can be expected given the critical nature of the analysis, observations of struggle of meaning also show that the quality of such discourse could be in many fields of discourse. These realities show that virtual communication in WhatsApp group is not cure phenomenon, but also has power beyond the language.

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