

Inaugural lecture

Language, culture, and social cognition

SETIAWATI DARMOJUWONO

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Academy Professor in Linguistics
University of Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

According to UNESCO data, there are about 6000 languages in the world. Nevertheless there are only about 150–200 languages that are spoken by more than 1,000,000 people (UNESCO Weltbericht/World news 2009). Language does not only function as a means of communication. It is a form of verbal expression of the human mind that contains the identity, values, norms, rules, customs, habits, and views of a language community. The diversity of languages in the world reflects the verbal expressions of the minds of various language communities.

As a linguist, there are three prominent figures that I admire because their thinking formed the basis of many linguistic theories, especially those related to the study of the meaning of language. They lived a few hundred years or decades ago but their ideas remain relevant to the study of language. In fact, there are some things that are not covered in current linguistic theories which are actually very useful for the study of language issues today, that have been covered in their ideas.

These three figures are from German-speaking countries, namely Germany and Austria. They are Christian Friedrich Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm von Humboldt (Wilhelm von Humboldt) (1767–1835), Karl Bühler (1879–1963), and Ludwig Josef Johann Wittgenstein (Ludwig Wittgenstein) (1889–1951). They were able to give birth to brilliant concepts in linguistics, because they had the insight that was based on a variety of disciplines. Wilhelm von Humboldt was a legal scholar, statesman, educational expert, and language researcher. Karl Bühler was a physician, psychologist, philosopher, linguist, and Ludwig Wittgenstein was an engineer, philosopher, an expert in mathematics and logic.

LINKAGE BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL COGNITION

Some of Wilhelm von Humboldt's concepts that appeal to me are related to the reciprocal relationship between a language and its speakers. For Humboldt the sustainability and ability of a language to survive is not due to the existence of a complete system of language rules that must be complied with by the speakers, but instead it is the speakers who provide the energy and power for the survival of the language (*energeia*). To use Saussure's terms, the energy of a language lies at the level of parole. According to Humboldt, speaking is the process of constant thinking to express thoughts through speech sounds (Humboldt 1963). The dynamic nature of a language lies in the exchange of thoughts among the language users. Through this activity, an individual's thoughts become more perfect. Humboldt's concept is interesting, because a thought that belongs to an individual becomes part of the public domain in a conversation. As Humboldt puts it:

Die Hervorbringung der Sprache ist ein inneres Bedürfniss der Menschheit, nicht bloss ein äusserliches zur Unterhaltung gemeinschaftlichen Verkehrs, sondern ein in ihrer Natur selbst liegendes, zur Entwicklung ihrer geistigen Kräfte und zur Gewinnung eine Weltanschauung, zu welcher der Mensch nur gelangen kann, indem er sein Denken an dem gemeinschaftlichen Denken mit Anderen zur Klarheit und Bestimmtheit bringt, unentbehrliches (Humboldt 1963: 390).

'Language is generated because it is one of the basic needs of humankind, not merely as an external means of communication, but as part of human nature itself, indispensable to develop its mental powers and to acquire one's worldview, which a human individual can only achieve by making his thinking clear and certain in interaction with the thinking of the language community.'

A language system that is able to accommodate its speakers' thoughts and can thrive in harmony with the development of the minds of its speakers is very important, because it will re-emit the energy and power that it possesses to its speakers. In my opinion, from the aspect of linguistics, Wilhelm von Humboldt's concept is interesting, because in linguistics in general the relationship between a language system and its speakers is associated with the conventions of the language community. The elements of energy and power of a language system related to the human mind are not exposed, and thus the dynamic nature of a language and the role of its speakers in the dynamics of the language are often overlooked. The differences that appear in language usage that are not in accordance with the rules of the language are generally regarded as language mistakes, without considering how suitable the language is as a manifestation of a person's mind.

Wilhelm von Humboldt's concepts which are related to language and thought reappeared in the cognitive semantics approach that examines meaning in terms of concepts, as Langacker (1987: 98) stated, "[I]n other words, studying the linguistic meaning is the same thing as studying the nature of human conceptual structure – a cover – all term for our thoughts, concepts, perceptions, images, and mental experience in general."

Cognitive semantics sees language as an expression of a speaker's mind based on his/her experience of interaction with the environment. The influence of Wilhelm von Humboldt's concepts, which are well known in linguistics, is the link between language and the worldview (*Weltanschauung*) of its speakers. Humboldt attributed worldview to a nation. He believed that a language is created by the people who own it. Thus, every language contains the special characteristics and influences of a nation (Humboldt 1963: 69).

Given the very rapid technological progress, human mobility and social change that occur in the nations of the world, Humboldt's concept does not seem entirely acceptable if a language is associated to a nation because today there are numerous multicultural and multilingual societies in one nation.

However, Humboldt's idea that language is *energeia* and not static, is understandable since it derives its energy from speakers who have different views of the universe (*Weltanschauung*), because this energy will have its impact on the worldview of the individual speakers. The concept becomes even more interesting when it is associated with the people of Indonesia who are very diverse in terms of both language and culture. The diversity of language and culture in the daily life of the Indonesian people are elements that complement and enrich the speakers, enabling them to achieve excellence through the introduction of various world views contained in the national language as well as the regional languages.

W. von Humboldt's thoughts had a very strong influence on Franz Boas, Edward Sapir, and Benjamin Lee Whorf who were prominent North American figures in Linguistic Anthropology in the early twentieth century. Thought associated with the relativity of language is known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis which states that language determines the worldview of a speaker through its grammatical categories and semantic classifications. There is a weak version and a strong version of the hypothesis which are related to the relativity of language. The stronger version supports the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis that language "determines" the speaker's worldview, while the weak version believes that language only "affects" the speakers' worldview.

Related to the idea of language as *energeia*, something that is alive and affects the perspective of the speakers, we'll look at what is happening in the language behaviour of the Indonesia people today. We all saw what happened at the plenary session of the Parliament on 28 October 2014. Not only were tables overturned and glasses smashed, but we also saw how the representatives of the people communicated at the plenary session. Turn-taking and discussion procedures were blatantly ignored, and the atmosphere of the meeting was chaotic. When the chairperson was speaking, interruptions were made by many people at the same time. People were shouting: "Listen to me! Just sit down!"; "Interruption, interruption!"; "Go back to your own seats!"; and other similar interjections. The Indonesian language does have expressions to convey opinions such as "*Saya setuju dengan pendapat Anda*" ("I agree with you"); "*Gagasan Anda sangat menarik, tetapi akan menjadi lebih bermanfaat jika*"; ("That's a very interesting idea, but it would be more

helpful if"); and many others, but those expressions were not internalized by the people's representatives as one of the procedures to express their opinions, and that was what started the shameful chaos in the parliamentary session. In Indonesian, people do not always use such phrases when they are about to deliver an opinion because those expressions are optional, even though using such expressions allows people to communicate politely. As a matter of fact, in Humboldt's view the getting-together of various ideas and thoughts will only enhance an individual's thinking.

For comparison let's take a look at the German language. Germany is a country that upholds democracy and individual opinion is highly respected. It is a common German habit to discuss various matters, both in the community and within the family. German children start to express their opinions freely from a very young age. The German language has a multitude of phrases to express ideas with courtesy. Germans will always use such expressions when they are giving their opinions or taking part in discussions. The following are a few examples: "*meiner Meinung nach*" ("in my opinion"); "*Ich denke, man kann das nicht so sehen, denn*" ("I think, one should not look at it like that, because"); "*Der ersten Aussage kann ich völlig zustimmen, weil*" ("I strongly agree with the first statement, because"); "*Ich sehe das ganz anders, denn*" ("I see it differently, because"); "*Ich habe da so meine Zweifel*" ("I am not quite sure about that"); "*Es könnte sein, dass*" ("It is possible, that"); "*Entschuldigen Sie, wenn ich Sie unterbreche,*" ("My apologies for interrupting you, but"); "*Dürfte ich dazu bitte auch etwas sagen?*" ("May I also say something about this?"); and so on. Learners of German as a foreign language have to learn such phrases as a single entity with whatever they are going to say, so that in a debate, even conflicting opinions can be expressed in a courteous manner.

Unfortunately, in the context of German language teaching at the high school in Indonesia, Humboldt's view seems to be largely overlooked because of curriculum's misinterpretation. In the 2013 curriculum for high school (SMA) and Madrasah Aliyah (MA), Islamic high school (the implementation of which has been postponed if the schools have only implemented it for a semester, because a lot of improvement still needs to be done), Indonesian SMA/MA students are expected to have competency standards related to attitudes to be able to graduate. This is also reiterated in a statement from the Ministry of Education and Culture:

Behaviour that reflects attitudes of people who are faithful believers, noble, confident, and are responsible for interacting effectively with their social and natural environment as well as in establishing themselves as a reflection of their nation in relationships with the world (Ministry of Education and Culture 2014).

In the teaching of German at SMA/MA level in Indonesia, behaviour that reflects the attitude of faithful believers is often translated into being thankful to God for the opportunity to learn German, an attitude which of course is difficult for the teacher to assess. There are even schools that start every lesson with prayer (not just at the beginning and end of a school day), when in fact,

this attitude of being faithful to their beliefs and able to interact effectively with their environment, for example, can be trained through phrases enabling them to express their ideas with courtesy. Mastering such expressions will encourage students to share their ideas and opinions with ease. The availability and use of these expressions are examples of how a language system can encourage people to express their thoughts more carefully, which fits in with Wilhelm von Humboldt's concept that a language system can retransmit its energy to its speakers to think.

Wilhelm von Humboldt's concept, that language is considered synonymous with the worldview of its speakers, has influenced the proponents of the relativity of language as specified in the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. The relationship between language, the human mind and the perception of reality is one area of cognitive linguistic studies. That very diverse scope of life, knowledge and experience of a person is arranged in the human brain with the help of language and are stored in the long term memory (semantic memory) in the form and schemata of concepts. A scheme is a mental representation of a structure based on experience a person acquires in interaction with the environment. In the process of understanding and interpreting meaning a person will choose a scheme that is appropriate to the conditions/events that are to be understood or interpreted. The scheme is flexible and can change, because it can also cover things that deviate from existing schemes (Schwarz 2008).

Schemata stored in the human brain are related to the scope of one's life/cultural background. The scope of a person's life cannot be separated from society; what happens in a society will be discerned by the senses and after being processed cognitively are stored in semantic memory.

I will now describe some linguistic expressions in Indonesian society, which we encounter daily in our environment. Such phrases are found in various forms of communication such as bulletin boards, posters, and graffiti on walls. The choice of words people use to express their thoughts is very diverse, ranging from courteous to rude.

<i>Stop kekerasan terhadap anak. Buatlah mereka tersenyum bahagia.</i>	'Stop violence against children. Make them smile happily.'
<i>Jen kaline resik, uriye becik.</i>	'If rivers are clean, life will also be clean'
<i>Kejar surga dengan sedekahmu sebelum ajal memanggil.</i>	'Pursue heaven through charity before death calls.' (National Humanitarian Agency)
<i>Buang sampah sembarangan? Malu dong sama dedek. (Accompanied by a picture of a bin and a small child throwing litter into bin)</i>	'Are you littering? Look at what this little child is doing. You should be ashamed of yourself'
<i>Awas, buang sampah di sini bonyok!</i>	'Throw your thrash here and you'll be beaten up!'
<i>Yang kencing di sini anjing.</i>	'Only dogs urinate here.'

Such different ways of expressing what is on one's mind that I have listed above is an everyday reality that we observe in our society.

Social cognition which is the action of processing information related to interpersonal relationships in society, namely to interpret, analyse and use information about (social) events can be divided into three stages (Fiske and Tailor 2013):

- Paying attention to social phenomena that occur around us.
- Entering what we have observed into our memory and saving it.
- Comparing it with the existing scheme in our memory to see if there are similar symptoms.

The processing that takes place in the second stage is closely related to semantic memory. If what we observe and save in our semantic memory is the concept of pejorative meaning (negative meaning), it is not surprising that such concepts are the ones that dominate the minds of individuals in the society.

In the city of Hildesheim, a small town in the German state of Niedersachsen, posters containing poems were posted on several bus stops as an expression of the thoughts of the Hildesheim city inhabitants, and these posters were periodically replaced with new posters. The themes of the poems are very diverse. There are poems that contain criticism of the government relating to matters of social security, conflicts between children and parents, the disclosure of feelings of lonely people, themes of love, the resentment that a student feels towards his school and others. Thoughts expressed through poetry will become more beautiful, although they may be about negative things. This idea could be applied in the Greater Jakarta area to reduce violence in society, which appears, among others, in the brawls between students or gangs. If people are given the opportunity to express their emotions verbally, in poetry or other literary texts, then violence could be suppressed. W. von Humboldt believes that thoughts and ideas can develop well through works of literature. And thus, language becomes more and more perfect, because it acts as a bridge of understanding between individuals within the community who express their feelings (Humboldt 1963).

MEANING OF LANGUAGE IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

The second leading figure that I admire is Ludwig Wittgenstein, not for his work *Tractatus-Logico-Philosophicus* which is famous for the phrase *die Grenzen meiner Sprache bedeuten die Grenzen meiner Welt* (the limits of my language mean the limits of my world), but Wittgenstein's *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, which state that:

Man kann für eine große Klasse von Fällen der Benützung des Wortes >Bedeutung< – wenn auch nicht für alle Fälle seiner Benützung – dieses Wort so erklären: Die Bedeutung eines Wortes ist sein Gebrauch in der Sprache (Wittgenstein 1977: 41).

'One can in many instances of the use of the word "meaning" – albeit not in all instances– explain it as: the meaning of a word is its use in the language.'

Through this book, Wittgenstein influenced J.L. Austin and Gilbert Ryle (the original creators of the theory of speech acts), and Peter Strawson. Wittgenstein, Ryle, and Austin are the proponents of ordinary language philosophy.

Ludwig Wittgenstein's concept came back into perspective in 1975 when Fillmore in the field of semantics argued that case theory is not sufficient to explain the elements associated with understanding, because understanding includes the unity of the structure of language, language behaviour, the process of understanding the language, change in the language, and the acquisition language. Fillmore used the term "frame" to refer to the conceptual structure, which includes the meaning of the language signs and their use.

By the word "frame" I have in mind any system of concepts related in such a way that to understand any of them you have to understand the whole structure in which it fits; when one of the things in such a structure is introduced into a text, or into a conversation, all of the others are automatically made available (Fillmore 1982: 111).

Ludwig Wittgenstein's concept relates to the meaning of words determined by their use as the basis for the theory of meaning which links up with the overall context of their use, and was developed both in the field of semantics as well as cognitive linguistics.

A prominent figure in semantics, Cruse, in his work entitled *Meaning in language; An introduction to semantics and pragmatics* (Cruse 2000) asserted that a complete analysis of meaning can be done if it is related to the context, or in other words, a satisfactory analysis of the meaning involves language elements and non-language elements. In semantics these are known as linguistic elements and encyclopaedic elements. In contemporary semantics, especially semantics using a cognitive approach, the barrier between the linguistic elements and encyclopaedic elements have been removed as has been done by Alexander Ziem in his work *Sprache und Wissen* (2008). The elimination of barriers allows the study of meaning to develop more rapidly and is very useful for studying meaning in intercultural communication, because cultural background helps to shape schemata that affect meaning. For example the word *Dorf* in German (village), has a lexical meaning similar to the equivalent word *desa* in Indonesian. The German word *Dorf* means *eine Siedlung auf dem Land, die kleiner als eine Stadt ist* (Cyffka, A and S. Haverkamp-Balhar 2007), 'a housing area in the countryside, which is smaller than a city' while *desa* means 'a group of houses outside the city forming a unit'; *udik* or *dusun* (*daerah pedalaman sebagai lawan kota*, KBBI 2014) 'the hinterland as opposed to the city'. The similarity in meaning between *Dorf* and *desa* is that they both refer to groups of houses that are not in the city. The Indonesian word *desa* also has the meaning of being far away or remote from a city. If these words are used in communication, the contextual meaning raised by these words may be different because of the influence of the cultural backgrounds of the speakers. The following example is a business conversation between E (an Indonesian businessman) and F (a business partner in Germany):

F invites a group of Indonesian businessmen to visit F's factory which exports its products to Indonesia.

F: *Wir haben für Sie meine Damen und Herren ein gemütliches Hotel auf dem Lande reserviert, damit Sie das Land, die Leute und die deutsche Kultur kennenlernen.*

'We have booked for you a cozy hotel in the countryside so that you can get to know the country, population and culture of Germany.'

E: *Ich dachte, dass wir in einem 5 Sternen Hotel in der Stadt bleiben.*

'I thought we were going to stay at a five star hotel in the city.'

F: *Oh tut mir leid, möchten Sie lieber ein Zimmer in der Stadt haben?*

'Sorry, would you prefer to stay in the city?'

(Darmojuwono 2007: 104).

Obstacles in this communication occur because the meaning of the word village for E and F is not the same. For F the village is a comfortable place, while for E it means a backward place that is remote or far away from the city and from modernity. This misunderstanding could have been avoided if the speaker and hearer had the knowledge and sensitivity to the scope of German cultural life and Indonesian culture. German people in general appreciate beautiful and natural environment, while the love for natural environment is not yet popular among the Indonesian people.

The ability to communicate across cultures involves not only language skills, but also requires certain sensitivity to one's own culture and the culture of the hearer, so as to be able to understand the hearer's thoughts and feelings better. Wittgenstein's opinion that the meaning of the word is determined by the use of the word is evident in intercultural communication such as has been presented above. Differences in contextual meaning of the words *Dorf/desa* are due to differences in the social cognition of the speaker which are influenced by the German cultural background and the Indonesian cultural background respectively. Information about rural nature is processed in a different way by German speakers and Indonesian speakers, because the way the Germans and the Indonesians view the countryside is not the same.

In the Indonesian society communication between individuals of different cultural backgrounds is something that we are involved in daily, both in face-to-face communication or via electronic media, for work purposes as well as purposes that are more of a personal nature. Very rapid advances in communication technology since the end of the twentieth century and boundaries between countries which are opening are expanding our communication networks. This condition is enabling us to interact with a much wider community coming from foreign countries with socio-cultural backgrounds that are different from those of Indonesia. Today intercultural communication skills should not only be mastered by those having professions related to foreign languages.

The Faculty of Humanities UI, which has twelve Study Programs, has a golden opportunity to develop more intensive intercultural communication

courses with theoretical and practical implications. The ability to communicate between cultures will be able to improve the competitiveness of Indonesia in the ASEAN Economic Community as of 2015. This is because the ASEAN free trade will induce investors from Asia and outside Asia to enter Indonesia. In such a condition, what is required are human resources that are capable of becoming “cultural bridges” between nations, such as translators, and people who have the ability to communicate between cultures. The International Language Institute (LBI) Faculty of Humanities University of Indonesia can provide training for people who, for example, are planning to do business with other nations, so that they will be able to deliver messages and communicate in an accurate manner in places with different environments and cultures. The ASEAN free trade and free trade in other regions, such as the EU, do not only require quality products, but also people who are able to interact appropriately in different cultural environments.

The third figure I admire is Karl Bühler (1879-1963), a psychologist, physician, philosopher who generated brilliant ideas in linguistics with his theory on *Organon-Modell der Sprache* (Organon model of language). In this theory he outlined in great detail the use of language signs in communication. There are three main elements that form the foundation of Karl Bühler’s theory, namely *einer-dem anderen-über die Dinge* (a person communicates with another person about something).

According to Karl Bühler there are three types of language function, namely the representative function, the expressive function, and the appellative function. The representative function is the correlation between language signs and what they represent (something they describe). The expressive function is the correlation between language signs and the speakers because language is used to express things that are related to the speakers, while the appellative function is the correlation between the language symbols and the hearer that aims to influence the hearer’s behaviour and feelings, as in the following quotation:

Es ist Symbol kraft seiner Zuordnung zu Gegenständen und Sachverhalten, Symptom (Anzeichen, Indicium) kraft seiner Abhängigkeit vom Sender, dessen Innerlichkeit es ausdrückt, und Signal kraft seines Appells an den Hörer, dessen äußeres oder inneres Verhalten es steuert wie andere Verkehrszeichen (Bühler 1982: 28).

‘It is a symbol because of its belonging to objects and their relations, a symptom (indication) because of its dependence on their sender, whose inner thoughts it expresses, and a signal because of its appeal to the hearer, whose outer or inner state it directs like other traffic signs.’

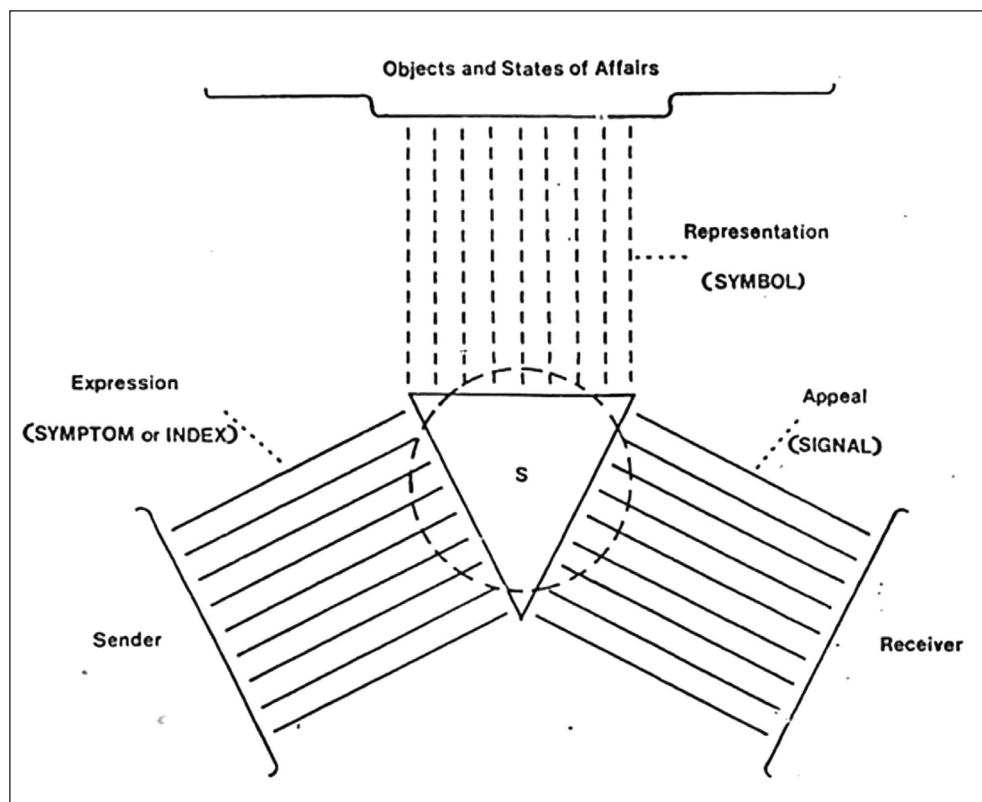


Figure 1. Bühler's model of language, "S" means 'language'.

The Organon model has had a pioneering function for theories associated with the use of language in communication. In linguistics, Karl Bühler's theory was a breakthrough, because language was not only seen as a system of signs, but also as a signal system that affects the behaviour of the message receiver. Roman Jakobson (1896 -1982) further differentiated Karl Bühler's language functions into the referential function, emotive function, poetic function, phatic function, conative function and metalingual function. Karl Bühler's idea became the foundation for pragmatics in linguistics.

What is interesting for me is the opinion that language is not only a system of signs, but it is in its use also a system of signals that influences the behaviour of the message receiver. Karl Bühler, whose thinking was influenced by *Ganzheit Psychologie*, had a holistic view of communication in which both verbal and non-verbal elements play a role. In connection with social cognition, one of the elements that can affect a conversation is stereotyping, the stereotype being a description of the nature of a group of people in society. This picture is not necessarily true, and could also be a prejudice.

In the study of linguistics, especially pragmatic studies comparing two different languages, the language elements commonly studied are those considered to have universal concepts which are then compared to the expression of verbal concepts, such as language forms that express courtesy,

rejection and so on. Research results are usually related to the background of the speakers to observe the link between language and culture. Related to ethno pragmatic research, Ehrhard (2003) states that the issues of intercultural communication studies should not only focus on the relationships between verbal expression and cultural backgrounds, but should put more focus on the interactions that occur, and the perception of the speaker towards the hearer and vice versa. These are the matters that are then linked with communication strategy (Darmojuwono 2007: 98).

Today the speaker's perception toward the hearer is a study of linguistic discourse that associates the macro to the micro elements of discourse, but in the study of discourse, the theoretical basis that examines the elements of the speaker's perception are linked to findings in other disciplines, such as anthropology, sociology and cultural studies. The concept of context in the study of discourse is still being developed and still many problems are faced (Wodak and Meyer 2004).

The following is an example of a conversation that is strongly influenced by German and Indonesian stereotypes (Darmojuwono 2007):

The background of the conversation: A is female lecturer who is going to conduct research at a university in Germany, and B is a German, a professor at the university who is the research partner of A.

B: *Haben Sie einen schönen Flug gehabt?*

'Did you have a pleasant flight?'

A: *Ja danke, ich würde gern mit Ihnen über meinen Plan sprechen.*

'Yes, thank you. I'd like to discuss my plans with you.'

B: *Ja natürlich. Haben Sie eine Familie?*

'Yes, of course. Do you have a family?'

A: *Ja, wir haben einen Sohn 12 Jahre alt. Haben Sie viele Mitarbeiter in Ihrem Institut?*

'Yes, we have a boy, 12 years old. Do you have many staff members in your institute?'

B: *Ist Ihr Sohn allein zu Hause?*

'Is your son at home alone?'

A: *Nein, mein Mann ist ja da.*

'No, my husband is there of course.'

B: *Arbeitet er nicht?*

'Doesn't he work?'

A: *Doch. Bis Nachmittags ist unser Sohn in der Schule. Am Abend ist mein Mann zu Hause.*

'Of course he does. My son is at school until the afternoon and in the evening my husband is at home.'

The conversation above shows the influence of stereotypes in the conversation pattern of A and B. A's conversation scheme is based on the stereotype of

Germans who prioritize efficient use of time (conversations are related to one's work rather than to things of a more personal nature). In a formal conversation the domain of work and the family are not mixed. On the other hand, B based his communications on Indonesian stereotypes, namely the closeness of individuals in the family. B's stereotype is associated with feminine and masculine societies with a clear division of roles between men and women, which is still often found in families in Indonesia. Family is the domain of women and work remains the domain of men.

Stereotypes help shape a community's social cognition and this has an impact on their language behaviour. Stereotypes affected the above conversation and led to a violation of Grice's maxim of relation (1975), namely A's desire to discuss her research plan did not receive any response from B, who steered the topic of conversation to the domain of the family.

My admiration for Wilhelm von Humboldt, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Karl Bühler is mainly related to their brilliant thoughts about language problems which underlie many linguistic theories of the twentieth and twenty first centuries. They viewed language as a whole which cannot be separated from the speakers and their cultural background. Language is alive and dynamic. A harmonious relationship between a language and its speakers, will not only increase the perfection of a language, but at the same time will increase the perfection of its speakers.

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