

Building Critical Awareness of Corona Virus-Related News: Cyber-Pragmatic Study of Covid-19 Hoaxes on Social Media

R. Kunjana Rahardi

Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

kunjana@usd.ac.id

Abstract

The New Coronavirus disease, referred to by the World Health Organization (WHO) as Covid-19, has now become the world pandemic. Grave concern over the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic is not only felt by the government, but also by all Indonesian citizens without exception. However, not all Indonesian citizens seemed to feel this concern. A number of people even spread hoaxes related to Covid-19. This led to the cyber-pragmatics research on Covid-19 hoaxes to describe the conventional external contexts and virtual external contexts. The main objective of this cyber-pragmatics research is to build critical awareness of Indonesian citizens so that they can interpret the utterances in the text related to the Covid-19 pandemic correctly. The forms of hoaxes and the intent of Covid-19 hoax are described in such detail that people are increasingly aware that hoaxes are not true and conflict with the intrinsic functions of language itself. This research aims to raise the community critical awareness in order to interpret the rampant hoaxes in their daily life. The research problem in the perspective of cyber-pragmatics is: What are the manifestations and intentions of Covid-19 seen from the perspective of cyber-pragmatics found in social media? Hence, the research objective is to: describe the manifestation and intentions of Covid-19 in the perspective of cyber-pragmatics found in social media. Furthermore, the main objective of this research is to build critical awareness to understand coronavirus-related news. From the analysis of the data, the researcher found the pragmatic meanings of Covid-19 hoax as follows: (1) insinuation; (2) insult; (3) questioning; (4) blaming; (5) degrading; (6) rumors; (7) agitation.

Keywords: *Cyber-pragmatics perspective, Covid-19 hoaxes, Virtual external context*

Introduction

The New Coronavirus, referred to by the World Health Organization (WHO) as Covid-19, has now become a pandemic and is very widespread in almost every country throughout the world. Coronavirus is widely believed to have emerged at a 'wet market' for animals in the Wuhan region, China at the end of 2019. In that market, various types of exotic animals are sold, both living and dead, including fish, birds, bats, anteaters, and many others. Such 'wet' animal markets are, of course, risky for virus transmission of various types of viruses from animals to humans as a result of poor hygiene standards. In fact, now the deadly virus has spread throughout the continent, leaving no country immune to the Covid-19 outbreak.

Indonesia was suspected to be exposed to the deadly Covid-19 virus in early March 2020. Before that date, there were pros and cons whether or not Indonesia was exposed to the virus from Wuhan, China. In fact, some people considered that Covid-19 to be an ordinary flu which should not be worried about. However, the reality proved differently. President Joko Widodo on Monday, March 2, 2020 officially announced that two Indonesian citizens were positively infected by Covid-19 after being in contact with Covid-19-positive Japanese citizens. Shortly afterwards, panic started to wreak havoc among the Indonesian people.

All were shocked to realize that the Coronavirus had already entered Indonesia. In a matter of a month, the number of patients identified as positive increased fantastically. *Worldometers* reported that per April 17, 2020, new Coronavirus infections were recorded as 2,178,848 cases. Of these figures, 45,359 people died, and 546,743 people were recovered. Once again, the figures for the Covid-19 pandemic case are dire.

The description of the development of new cases of Coronavirus infection both in the world and in Indonesia is very fantastic and shocking to everyone, and everyday the number of new patients and death tolls keeps increasing. The deep concern over the outbreak of the Covid-19 virus is not only felt by the government, but by all Indonesian citizens without exception. However, this uncertain situation is taken advantage by some parties who want to create fear and panic in the society. They spread hoaxes or fake news related to Covid-19.

The rampant spread of hoaxes amidst the coronavirus outbreak caught the researcher's attention to conduct the cyber-pragmatic research on Covid-19-related hoaxes by describing the conventional external contexts and virtual external contexts. The main objective of this cyber-pragmatics research is to build critical awareness of the Indonesian citizens so that they can interpret the utterances in the text related to the Covid-19 pandemic correctly.

The forms of hoaxes and the intent of Covid-19 hoaxes will be described in such detail that many people become increasingly aware that hoaxes are not really true and contradict the intrinsic function of language itself. In addition, as we are now entering the industrial revolution 4.0, the digital literacy requires that internet users be digitally literate. This research will promote the public's critical awareness in interpreting hoaxes among the incoming flows of news on a daily basis.

Hoaxes aim to trick the reader into believing that some fake information is true. The makers of hoaxes or fake news actually are truly aware that the substance of the news they make is not true. However, they spread hoaxes on purpose to frame public opinion. Thus, the objectives of hoax is to create public opinion, shape public opinion, and form public perceptions about some information. Hoaxes may be intended to test the intelligence, accuracy, sharpness, or foresight of social media users.

In the researcher's observation, hoaxes can be present in a variety of manifestations ranging from just horsing around and being sarcastic, which could lead to a fatal and wide-ranging impact, economically-motivated when coupled with fraudulent intentions, politically-motivated in the form of propaganda or the framing of mass opinion, socially-motivated in the form of actions to agitate a group of citizens, etc. Hoaxes are usually present in communities with weak critical abilities and are usually present when an issue has not been completely resolved. The solution of the problem is still critically questioned by the public. Amidst vagueness and obscurity of problems, hoaxes are spread mercilessly.

In the Indonesian history, hoaxes were cultivated in 2014, especially during the 2014 presidential election campaign. The hoaxes were widespread as a result of the incessant presidential campaign through social media. The spread of hoaxes on social media is aimed at destroying the image of political opponents. Thus, hoaxes are the consequence of irresponsible use of social media. So, the political campaign through spreading hoaxes is a black campaign. The Press Council of Indonesia stated that the hoax was rife in society as a manifestation of public distrust of the partiality of the mainstream mass media.

As a result of distrust of the mainstream mass media, the hoax makers used the alternative media which could freely fabricate the news to serve their purpose. Consequently, social media which was originally intended to build good and useful public relations, to create quality social relations, turns out to have been hijacked to spread fabricated news to bring each other down.

In the context of the intrinsic function of language, the use of social media to turn against each other is contradicting the nature of language itself. The essential function of language is as a means to establish communication and collaboration with others, and to

strengthen cooperation between parties. The creation of hoax is in no way linked to any aspect of the intrinsic function of the language. Therefore, in the researcher's belief, language manifestations that tend to be malfunctioned, violent, and wild as in the creation of hoax will not last long. Before long, it is certain that the manipulation of the language for the creation of hoax will disappear.

In addition, it is also necessary to convey the characteristics of hoaxes. They usually: (1) have a large perlocutionary force as the hoax can go viral through social media; (2) have negative messages which certainly can cause panic, confusion, and anxiety among the readers, which can turn sour unless handled properly; (3) have a stereotypical discourse that ends with an appeal to immediately forward the negative news to go viral, both accompanied by threats and without threats; (4) take advantage of the goodwill of the readers who typically do not examine critically whether the information is fact or hoax, before passing it on to other parties in social media; (5) are characterized by assumed names of the content spreaders, hiding under fake identities and social media profiles.

The theories underlying the research of Covid-19-related hoaxes are cyber-pragmatic theories. This new pragmatic theory was introduced by Francisco Yus in 2001 to respond to the impact of the development of information technology and its influence on the youngest branch of language, which is called pragmatics. With the development of internet technology, the aspects contained in the pragmatics are certainly shifting and changing. Changes and shifts of aspects in pragmatic studies are accommodated in cyber-pragmatics. The new pragmatic perspective refers to internet-based context-based communication.

Therefore, research data in the perspective of cyber-pragmatics are also taken from the internet. According to Francisco Yus and Mirriam A. Locher, it is called internet-based communication or 'internet-mediated communication.' Thus, this pragmatic perspective bases its study on natural internet-based speeches, and manifests on social media that are very easily accessible via smart phones (smartphones). These social media can include platforms such as: Twitter, Whatsapp, Email, Blogs, Websites, which have become inseparable parts of modern people's life.

Literature Review

Furthermore, the theory of cyber-pragmatics cannot be separated from the relevance theory. The Theory of Relevance was first conveyed by Sperber and Wilson who explained that in communicating people must always prioritize the relevance to the substance of conversation [1]. The relevance in the conversation is actually one of the maxims contained in Grice's Cooperative Principles.

In terms of breadth, the maxim of relevance in Grice's Cooperative Principles is broader than the relevance in the Theory of Relevance. However, in the actual practice of communication and interaction, the principle of relevance is regarded as important to be taken into account [2]. So communicating is more than just knowing whether the information is adequate or truthful as conveyed in Grice's maxims of quantity and quality respectively. That is exactly what is meant in the principle of relevance, not in the maxim of relevance.

Thus it can be reiterated that ostensive communication and interactions should prioritize the understanding between the speaker and addressees, in addition to the quality and quantity of information as argued by H.P. Grice. So more than all of that, Deirde and Sperber prioritize the importance of the nature of context, namely personal and communal assumptions that are understood together by the speaker and the addressee in communication [3]. Without such understanding, what actually happens is not communication, especially ostensive communication.

Furthermore, related to the situational context theory, the theory was first introduced by Malinowski who was a well-known European anthropologist examining the ethnographic methods of the language of Kiriwinia in the Trobriand Community in the Pacific Islands.

From his ethnographic recording of the community, he had difficulty understanding texts in the language in the Papua New Guinea region as a result of removing contexts [4].

Had the translation of the text been carried out by taking contexts into consideration, the understanding process of the ethnographic work would have been done well. The context that is entwined with the ethnographic work is called the situational contexts [5]. The idea of situational contexts is further elaborated in J.R. Firth, a British linguist whose early work focused on the context of the situation.

Function-oriented linguistics that developed in Europe was influenced by Firth's thought related to situational contexts. In the view of J.R. Firth, the context of the situation in the language can be broken down into four, namely: (1) participants or interlocutors, (2) actions of the participants or interlocutors, (3) other relevant speech events, and (4) perlocutionary acts [5]. The first aspect is participants or interlocutors.

Dimensions contained in the first aspect of the situational contexts, namely participants or interlocutors, include factors such as sex, age, socio-cultural background, personal and communal presuppositions, and many more. In the perspective of time, it is believed that there will be developments in different context elements. Next, the aspect of participant's actions can be broken down into two, namely verbal actions using human natural language, and actions that are not verbal with nonverbal language substitutions [6].

People who speak with verbal aspects are given segmental and non-segmental dimensions, while someone who communicates non-verbally cannot be observed in terms of segmental and non-segmental aspects but rather by observing the movements of the body and the movements of their members. These aspects can be kinesics or non-kinesics, both paralinguistic and non-paralinguistic [7].

Furthermore, the third dimension of context is another speech event that points to any entity around which the speech occurs. The presence of other entities can be either objects or non-objects, visible or invisible. Someone who believes that somewhere there are magical objects, objects that are sacred, objects that are praised as talismans, will automatically change the language code once he is aware of the existence of these objects while speaking [8]. People sometimes decrease the volume of their voices, softening the way they speak, once they realize they are in the presence of sacred objects.

It is important to discuss contexts of the situation as stated by Firth. It is important to consider whether the impact is positive or negative, useful or not in the context of interaction and communication. In communicating and interacting with others, it is important to consider that the situational contexts carry out the function of language, namely as a means of social control [4].

Fake news and hoaxes, which have gone viral recently, are related to various controversial issues in this country, including those related to the Covid-19 pandemic, results from the widespread disregard of the function of language as a social control.

So when speaking, both the speaker and the addressee must think whether their speech brings good or bad influence for others, painful or encouraging others, bringing others down, et cetera. So, considering the situational contexts entails considering the perlocutionary act of their speech. Dignified and highly cultured societies, of course, consider these matters in language [9]. As a high-context community, the Javanese society considers these things in communication.

They respond carefully and convey things carefully to other parties. They make a lot of consideration before speaking because they know the effects of their speech. They will not want communication and interaction by means of a language, whose main function is to develop reason (critical mind) and increase cooperation (acts of inclusion), is hindered or broken down when such thoughtful consideration is not heeded. Therefore, potentially negative impacts of speech must be taken into account carefully in discussing the situational contexts [10].

As a result of information technology through their modern gadgets, their lives have arguably shifted from being collectivistic to being very individualistic. The facts are used to justify that there are no purely individualistic society nor purely collectivistic society.

When applied to individuals, the true meaning is also similar, no individual is purely individualistic nor purely collectivistic [11]. So technological developments change people's perceptions of individual and collective societies.

Another thing to consider in relation to the context, especially the cultural context, is the fact that in culture there are always ideological dimensions or beliefs shared by the group of people who own that culture [12]. To consider the cultural context also means to consider the cultural dimensions of individuals or groups of citizens as mentioned earlier. So it is clear that ideology cannot be separated from the beliefs and faiths that could manifest in the religions embraced by the people concerned.

Theories about the context presented earlier are all taken into account to conduct this study, as well as the fact that in the cyber-pragmatics dimension the context shifted from conventional external contexts to virtual external contexts [13]. Thus, it can also be said that the theories presented earlier that are placed as a frame of reference as well as an analytical tool in this study [14].

Based on the background of the problem and based on the problem identified earlier, the research problem in the perspective of cyber-pragmatics is formulated as follows: What are the manifestations and intentions of Covid-19 seen from the perspective of cyber-pragmatics found in social media?

Therefore, the research in the perspective of cyber-pragmatics with conventional external context devices and virtual external contexts aims to describe the manifestation of Covid-19 hoaxes in the perspective of cyber-pragmatics that appears in the community? Furthermore, the main objective of this research is to build community critical awareness in understanding the coronavirus-related news [15].

Methodology

Research in the perspective of cyber-pragmatics using conventional external contexts and virtual external contexts is qualitative descriptive. The object of this study was the Covid-19 hoaxes. Thus, the research data in the perspective of cyber-pragmatics are the utterances containing Covid-19 hoaxes [14]. The source of this research data substantively is texts containing Covid-19 hoaxes. As a locational data source, this study uses social media, especially Twitter and Instagram, which can be reached around the time of this research. In cyber pragmatics, aspects of virtual context are highly predominant.

Furthermore, the data in the form of utterances containing Covid-19 hoaxes were collected by applying the method of observation. The observation employed an uninvolved interview as the basic technique and the recording and note-taking techniques as the follow-up technique [16]. By employing the data collection methods and techniques, this research data was collected sufficiently. However, the data cannot be subjected to data analysis methods and techniques because they are still raw data.

Therefore, the next step is data identification. The data that have been well identified are then selected, sorted, specified, to be classified [17]. After the types of data are presented properly, the next step is to typify the data to get the types of data. This step is the final step in data collection. Next, the data validation step is carried out by the researcher. The validation step is carried out in two ways, namely expert triangulation by asking for relevant expert's opinion, and theory triangulation carried out by referring to the designated theories related to the research data.

Furthermore, data analysis methods and techniques are applied to analyze the data that has been presented properly. The data analysis method applied is the distribution analysis method or commonly known as the distribution method. The technique used in applying the distribution method is the forward expansion technique. The extra-lingual dimensions of this research are analyzed by applying the contextual method or the identity method, specifically the extra linguistic one [18]. Finally, the results of this study are presented

with an informal method, namely using narrative accounts, instead of numerical or statistical accounts.

Research Results and Discussion

Based on the obtained research data, the manifestations of the hoax producers' intention to spread fake news or hoaxes related to the Covid-19 pandemic are identified. In the following section, each of the findings of the pragmatic meaning of the hoax is presented one by one.

Hoaxes Containing the Pragmatic Meaning of Insinuation

The act of insinuating through utterances directed at a person or a group of people to frame a public opinion or perception of a certain phenomenon can be classified as a hoax. Thus, the act of insinuating to influence public opinion by distorting factual information to suit their twisted agenda is a dishonorable act. In the following excerpt in Hoax Data 1, "Tea Can Cure Covid-19, Really?" Is a speech intended to satirize the finding that tea contains certain substances such as Methylxanthine, Theobromine, and Theophylline that can ward off viruses in humans.

The insinuating utterance spread by the creator of this fake news aims to raise doubts among the public on the health benefits of tea, especially as an antidote to the virus. The insinuation spread to the public via chain messages contained misinformation, stirred up endless debates, and eventually confused the public. When the public is doubtful and unsure which information is trustworthy or not, then the mission of the hoax creators is accomplished. They have influenced public opinion [14]. The following excerpt of utterance illustrates the point.

Hoax Data 1

Tea Can Cure Covid-19, Really?

https://www.instagram.com/p/B-g1BDEHBHe/?utm_source=ig_web_button_share_sheet

Context: A chain message containing information that tea can cure COVID-19 began to circulate via WhatsApp Groups. It was reported that a doctor from China named Li Wenliang discovered that steeped hot tea containing Methylxanthine, Theobromine, and Theophylline can ward off viruses in humans. Furthermore, the Antaranews.com news media on Friday, April 3, 2020 stated that based on searches, not a single article mentioned that Li Wenliang had said the chemical compounds in tea could fight the coronavirus. In fact, no research findings has proven that tea can cure Covid-19. Tea may increase body immunity but cannot cure Covid-19.

The similar insinuation can be identified in the following excerpt from Hoax Data 2: Religious Holiday Allowance and the 13th Salary Cut? The hoax related to the deduction of holiday allowances and the 13th salary appeared before the government through the Minister of Finance could explain the details of the affected recipients of holiday allowances due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In the previous section, it was explained that hoaxes usually appear in chain messages before the information of certain issue is clear.

During the obscurity, indecision, confusion, ambiguity of information, hoax producers strike with fake news to confuse the public [15].

The misinformation does not only confuse the public, but it can also distort the people's perception of a public policy issued by the government. Another aim is to smear the public image of the financial authority associated with the Covid-19 pandemic. So clearly, the utterance in the following Hoax Data 2 is a manifestation of hoax, whose meaning is very clear. To illustrate this, please read the excerpt carefully.

Hoax Data 2

Religious Holiday Allowance and the 13th Salary Cut?

https://www.instagram.com/tv/B-qvUb_HC_8/?utm_source=ig_web_button_share_sheet

Context: Tribunnews, Thursday, April 9, 2020 reported that the THR (Religious Holiday Allowance) and 13th Salary might be cut. This move was allegedly taken following the decrease in the State Revenues due to the coronavirus outbreak, resulting in the speculation that Civil Servants or ASN (State Civil Apparatus) might not receive the 13th salary and holiday allowance (THR) this year. Another cause is the government has lavishly given incentives to the business world and social aids to reduce the impact of the coronavirus. In addition, state revenue is also projected to experience contraction due to declining economic activity amidst the pandemic. The news is unconfirmed and remains circulating gossips as there is no official information related to salary cuts.

Hoaxes Containing the Pragmatic Meaning of Insult

Insulting is different from ridicule because the varying degrees of impact they cause to one's dignity can be very different. Ridicule does not always hurt the feelings of a person being ridiculed. But insulting can really target the dignity of someone being insulted [19]. Thus, insults are more severe and more fatal than mere ridicule. In the excerpt of Hoax Data 3 that reads, "President Jokowi's Alleged Corruption of Rp.59 Trillion during coronavirus pandemic." The hoax producer clearly wanted to spread hate speech by smearing his public image. The hoax contains accusation that the president had committed corruption during the Covid-19 pandemic. Of course, almost no one believes in the substance of the fake news. It is hard to believe how the hoax producers could come up with such corruption allegations.

The hoax makers were ignorant enough to find reliable information and carried on spreading false news without any proofs. The goal of spreading hoax, of course, is to smear the image of high-ranking state officials. It destroys not only the image, but also the reputation and dignity of the president. The community must have a strong critical awareness that such an act is not commendable [20]. An insult like this can send the perpetrators to prison. The following excerpt in the Hoax Data 3 illustrates the point.

Hoax Data 3

President Jokowi's Alleged Corruption of Rp. 59 Trillion during Covid-19 Pandemic.

<https://www.instagram.com/p/B-pEincnyjA/?igshid=11q9161vn1wlc>

Context: The news published on the antarnews.com went viral via whatsapp containing a hoax of the mega corruption of village funds totaling 59 trillion during a virus outbreak. Short messages circulating via whatsapp also included news from Liputan6.com online. This news circulated on Instagram on March 31, 2020. This news began to emerge when the government made the decision to cut village funds totaling 47 trillion to ease the burden of the people affected by the coronavirus pandemic. The 45 billion budget cut will be added to the State Budget to be allocated for the health sector, social sector, tax incentives and community business credit simulations and to finance the national economic recovery program.

Hoaxes Containing the Pragmatic Meaning of Doubting

In the researcher's observation, the act of questioning or doubting scientific findings, or perhaps local wisdom related to traditional medicines is unwise. Questioning and doubting everything carelessly will greatly affect public perception. Today, possibly

everyone believes that betel leaf contains certain beneficial ingredients for health, such as for mouth-washing [21]. The information that the betel leaf is also very good for warding off the coronavirus is being questioned by the hoax maker.

The question might have a positive dimension to raise people's critical awareness. However, spreading unconfirmed information regarding health issues during the pandemic is not wise. The following excerpt elaborates the point more comprehensively.

Hoax Data 4

Is it true that Chewing Betel Leaves can Prevent Coronavirus?

https://www.instagram.com/p/B-XEL_knxaZ/?utm_source=ig_web_button_share_sheet

Context: This news was published in antarnews.com on Monday, March 30, 2020. It is reported that consuming betel leaves once a day can prevent the coronavirus, which is currently spreading throughout the world, including Indonesia. This claim was said to have come from a doctor in Singapore who said that chewing betel leaves at least once a day, especially in the morning, can ward off the coronavirus because betel leaves contain anti-septic agents. As a matter of fact, consuming betel leaves in the wrong amount can affect the health of mouth and teeth. At present, no research findings confirm that betel leaves can prevent coronavirus. This should provide appropriate and useful information for the community in combating the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

Hoax Containing the Pragmatic Meaning of Blaming

Hoax makers are very creative in finding potential issues to be twisted, fabricated, and spread to the public as fake news. However, the target recipients of hoaxes are unassuming and gullible public who are not widely informed and critical to check and recheck any information. The hoax makers target these people in order to influence their perception, change their opinion, and turn them into accomplices in spreading fake news. They build credibility with these people, who will be mobilized easily when the time to strike has come. From the virtual external contexts, it was revealed that the objective of spreading hoaxes is to mobilize them in social movements. Cyber-pragmatics can actually have many roles and contributions related to this [14].

Issues related to the Rapid Test and PCR Method to test coronavirus positive in a person are raised in this false news. The hoax maker certainly believes that many people do not fully understand this. So instead of clarifying the substance of the difference between the two things, the newsmaker tends to start blaming. The news writer was not wise enough to know that his article contained false information. While the government works hard to educate the public regarding these issues, the hoax makers make matters worse. Instead of enlightening the public with the correct information, they create confusion among the public by blaming the government [22]. The following excerpt from Hoax Data 5 elaborates this issue.

Hoax Data 5

Differences between Rapid Test and PCR (Polymerase Chain Reaction) Method

https://www.instagram.com/p/B-HrAsMHrmB/?utm_source=ig_web_button_share_sheet

Context: This news was reported on the antarnews.com on Tuesday, March 24, 2020. This news explained the difference between the rapid test and the PCR (polymerase chain reaction) method. The differences included the way the test was carried out, the method of diagnosis, the duration of diagnosis and the accuracy of diagnoses of the two types of tests used. This news was supposed to answer the most frequently-asked questions related to the proper Covid-19 examination. It should provide new information for lay people of the types of Covid-19 examinations.

Hoaxes Containing the Pragmatic Meaning of Degrading

The following utterance has a pragmatic meaning of degrading the government's policy, as seen from the hoax as follows, "Free or Discounted Electricity Financed from World Bank Debt." The hoax producers stirred up trouble by questioning the government policy of freeing or discounting electricity bills for the households in Indonesia. The condescending aspect of the statement lies in the speculation that all of this was funded by debts to the World Bank. It is true that whether or not the discounted and free electricity bills were financed by debts to the World Bank needs to be addressed. The hoax implied to the readers that the government had just added their debts to the World Bank. Provoked by such a hoax, the public will easily turn against the government's policies and harbor resentment against the government.

Such a hoax does not portray the government in a positive light and thus can be detrimental to many people, even detrimental to the country. Therefore, critical awareness of the community needs to be constantly raised and built, so that in the future they will be critical of various types of hoaxes targeted to influence their opinion. On the one hand, the social media's ease of access by any members of the community is a good thing. On the other hand, the ease of access also allows hoaxes to run rampant [23]. This ease of access must be supported by wisdom and understanding of the intricacies of false news. The following excerpt of Hoax Data 6 illustrates the point.

Hoax Data 6

Discounted and Free Electricity Financed by World Bank Debt.
https://www.instagram.com/p/B-tzrmplkv0/?utm_source=ig_web_button_share_sheet

Context: News circulated through chain messages on behalf of the Minister of Finance Sri Mulyani stating that the fund allocated to provide discounted and free electricity during the Corona Pandemic was taken from the 5 trillion loans from the World Bank. This is a baseless hoax. As quoted from Liputan6.com on Wednesday, April 8, 2020, the Indonesian government did not borrow money from the World Bank. The fund was allocated from the 2020 State Budget for the coronavirus relief programs.

Hoax Containing the Pragmatic Meaning of Rumors

Rumors always occur when the information is unclear. The ambiguity of the information causes people to form their own perception about the information. Hoax makers revel in the obscurity of information [24]. Instead of clarifying the information, they manipulate the information in such a way that it invokes emotional responses. In the following excerpt from Hoax Data 7, the rumor lies in the statement that the Covid-19 vaccines have been available and circulating in the community.

The truth of the information is unconfirmed yet as such vaccine has not been produced anywhere in the world. Towards the end of April 2020, a university in the UK will test the vaccine on humans. It is clear that no Covid-19 vaccine has been in circulation. These rumors may backfire as people keep their guard down assuming that coronavirus vaccine is already available. The following excerpt of Hoax Data 7 illustrates the point.

Hoax Data 7

Is Covid Vaccine Already Available?

https://www.instagram.com/p/B-LXo_Cnp55/?utm_source=ig_web_button_share_sheet

Context: Antaranews.com reported on Wednesday, March 25, 2020 that a vaccine was found to treat the coronavirus disease. This news also circulated widely through whatsapp groups. The photo of supposedly the COVID-19 vaccine was added with the following narrative: "Good news. The Coronavirus vaccine is ready. The vaccine can cure patients

within 3 hours after injection. Hats off to US scientists. Trump now announces that Roche Medical Company will launch a vaccine on Sunday and millions of doses are ready. In fact, it turns out the message is not true, the vaccine contained in the photo is only a vaccine to detect covid-19 produced in South Korea. This news explains to the public that until now there is no vaccine to cure covid-19.

Hoax Containing the Pragmatic Meaning of Agitation

One of the goals of creating false news or hoax is to stir up trouble. Agitation or confusion occurs because the impact of the hoax is so strong that a group of people, even some people may be provoked to cause a brouhaha, through incomplete and unconfirmed information regarding general public interest [25]. In the following remarks, the disturbance was raised from the news that the Coronavirus could infect people twice. People can die from being infected once. Let alone twice. This breeds fear and anxiety among the people during the pandemic. The news causes people's fear to escalate.

So it is true that the main purpose of hoax news is to influence public perceptions about certain matters. When their perception is easily influenced and swayed, people are gradually and easily controlled by certain parties who might have an ulterior motive to use them to attain their objectives. In other words, hoax actually endangers public safety. Please take a closer look at the following excerpt from the Hoax Data 8 to clarify this point.

Hoax Data 8

Can Coronavirus Infect People Twice?

https://www.instagram.com/p/B96IagNnYTx/?utm_source=ig_web_button_share_sheet

Context: Antarnews.com reported on Thursday, March 19, 2020 the repeated infection of Covid-19 to one patient. It was reported that those who had been infected by the coronavirus had better immunity so that they would not be infected for the second time. The statement was supported by the opinion of a professor named Jon Cohen, an infectious disease expert who stated that a person infected with coronavirus was generally immune and would not be infected again. However, there is always an exception where a person who has been infected will be re-infected and that is a natural case. Upon reading the content of the news, the public should have extensive knowledge related to Covid-19 and not be led to easily believe in anything they read.

Hoax Containing the Pragmatic Meaning of Confusion

A hoax is considered successful, or assumed to be successful when it stirs confusion among the targeted community. The main objective of hoax is to confuse people. Being confused means not knowing what to do next. A confused group of people or mob will be easily led to think or believe in things they want to believe. In the following excerpt, the 'Simple 10-Second Coronavirus Detection' is clearly confusing to the readers.

People who already have high critical awareness will have no problem reading this hoax. In contrast, uneducated people usually do not have critical awareness and will be easily confused upon reading this hoax [26]. The following excerpt in Hoax Data 9 data should be considered further in this regard.

Hoax Data 9

Simple 10-Second Coronavirus Detection Test

https://www.instagram.com/p/B9TM61OFzRS/?utm_source=ig_web_button_share_sheet

Context: On Tuesday, March 3, 2020, liputan6.com via instagram reported that the Covid-19 test can be done in 10 seconds without requiring a doctor's explanation. After

searching, Liputan6.com stated that the news was not true. In fact, Eijkman Institute of Molecular Biology takes two to three days to detect Covid-19 by using the rapid test method and the PCR (polymerase chain reaction) method. Such information should be used appropriately to enlighten the community instead of misleading them.

The cyber-pragmatics research on Covid-19-related hoaxes found that there are 7 pragmatic meanings in the hoaxes. The pragmatic meanings of hoax were found based on the analysis of the virtual external contexts. Virtual external contexts become very important in analyzing the pragmatic meanings of hoax because this research data are locally sourced from social media [27]. The external contexts are no longer conventional but virtual. Aspects in conventional contexts need to be further detailed so that they can be replaced to analyze data from the internet.

The seven pragmatic meanings of covid-19 hoax found are as follows: (1) insinuation; (2) insult; (3) doubting/questioning; (4) blaming; (5) degrading; (6) rumors; (7) agitation. The discovery of the pragmatic meaning of hoax is expected to raise the community's critical awareness so that they will not be easily provoked by hoax [28]. As quoted in newspapers, there are currently no less than 554 hoaxes. It is quite alarming. The contribution of linguistics, especially in the perspective of cyber pragmatics, to educate the public so that it is not easily provoked by Covid-19 hoaxes needs to be continually promoted by linguists.

Conclusion

From the research and the analysis of the data, the researcher found the pragmatic meanings of Covid-19 hoax as follows: (1) hoax containing the pragmatic meaning of insinuation; (2) hoax containing the pragmatic meaning of insult; (3) hoax containing the pragmatic meaning of questioning; (4) hoax containing the pragmatic meaning of blaming; (5) hoax containing the pragmatic meaning of degrading; (6) hoax containing the pragmatic meaning of rumors; (7) hoax containing the pragmatic meaning of agitation. The seven pragmatic meanings of hoax associated with Covid-19 are important for people to build and raise their critical awareness of dealing with hoaxes which are commonplace in the information technology era.

In the digital, ease of access to the social media allows any information, including fake news, to spread easily. The cyber-pragmatics perspective using virtual external contexts will greatly contribute to the understanding of hoax. However, the limitation of this study lies in the small number of data to be analyzed. The limited locational data sources also resulted in inadequate data variation. These deficiencies will be compensated through a broader and more comprehensive research recommended to future researchers.

References

- [1] G. Martínez-Camino and M. Pérez-Saiz, "A pragmatics theory on television advertising," *J. Pragmat.*, 2012.
- [2] N. R. Norrick, "Issues in conversational joking," *J. Pragmat.*, 2003.
- [3] J. Chen, "Research Trends in Intercultural Pragmatics," *Aust. J. Linguist.*, 2017.
- [4] Jumanto, "Phatic Communication: How English Native Speakers Create Ties of Union," *Am. J. Linguist.*, 2014.
- [5] M. A. K. Halliday, *Learning how to mean : explorations in the development of language*. 1975.
- [6] H. Basturkmen and T. T. M. Nguyen, "Teaching Pragmatics," in *The Routledge Handbook of Pragmatics*, 2017.
- [7] M. Ephratt, "Linguistic, paralinguistic and extralinguistic speech and silence," *J. Pragmat.*, 2011.
- [8] M. Danesi, "Linguistic Anthropology," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences: Second Edition*, 2015.
- [9] M. A. Luardini and M. Simbolon, "Ecolinguistics for teaching English," *Asian EFL J.*, 2016.
- [10] A. Schmidt, "Implicit human computer interaction through context," *Pers. Technol.*, 2000.
- [11] A. Bandura, "Social cognitive theory in cultural context," *Applied Psychology*. 2002.

- [12] R. K. Rahardi, "Phatic Language in a Specific Culture Perspective in the Context of Internationalization of the Indonesian Language," *KnE Soc. Sci.*, 2018.
- [13] J. Saeed, "Pragmatics and semantics," in *Foundations of Pragmatics*, 2011.
- [14] M. A. Locher, "Cyberpragmatics: Internet-Mediated Communication in Context," *J. Pragmat.*, 2013.
- [15] F. Yus, *Cyberpragmatics, Internet-mediated communication in context*, 1st ed. Amsterdam: John Benjamin Publishing Company, 2011.
- [16] Sudaryanto, *Metode dan Aneka Teknik Analisis Bahasa*, 1st ed. Yogyakarta: Sanata Dharma University Press, 2016.
- [17] L. Science *et al.*, "An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method," *J. Pragmat.*, 2017.
- [18] M. Mahsun, "Metode Penelitian Bahasa," *Jakarta PT Raja Grafindo Persada*, 2005.
- [19] D. F. Rossen-Knill and R. Henry, "The pragmatics of verbal parody," *J. Pragmat.*, 1997.
- [20] V. Miller, "Phatic culture and the status quo: Reconsidering the purpose of social media activism," *Convergence*, 2017.
- [21] S. G. J. N. Senanayake, "Indigenous knowledge as a key to sustainable development," *J. Agric. Sci.*, 2016.
- [22] M. Rozakis, "The cultural context of emergencies," *Disaster Prev. Manag. An Int. J.*, 2007.
- [23] C. Lucas, R. Bayley, and A. B. Kelly, "The Sociolinguistics of Sign Languages," in *Clinical Sociolinguistics*, 2008.
- [24] R. Jakobson, "Quest for the Essence of Language," *Diogenes*, 1965.
- [25] C. Bulcaen, *The Whorf Theory Complex: A Critical Reconstruction*. 1998.
- [26] J. J. Gumperz and J. Cook-Gumperz, "Studying language, culture, and society: Sociolinguistics or linguistic anthropology?," *Journal of Sociolinguistics*. 2008.
- [27] J. C. Richards, "Second language teacher education today," *RELC Journal*. 2008.
- [28] R. K. Rahardi, "Personal and Communal Assumptions to Determine Pragmatic Meanings of Phatic Functions," *Ling. Cult.*, vol. 10, no. 10(2), pp. 95–98, 2016.