

“This is so Omar” – building interpersonal relationships through multi-layered perspective shifting in Indonesian youth conversation

Michael C Ewing
University of Melbourne

Dwi Noverini Djenar
University of Sydney

We present a close analysis of a face-to-face talk involving two young Indonesian women engaged in *curhat* ‘problem-sharing’. The talk is constructed around the re-reading of a series of text messages between a former boyfriend and a current boyfriend who was posing as one of the women while using her mobile phone. Each woman shares her version of the events leading up to the series of sham text messages, using complex embedding of reported speech, thoughts and text as they try to untangle who said what to whom and what the various actors’ feelings and reactions were during the unfolding events. Complex shifts in perspective are presented. Combining the approaches of interactional linguistics and narrative studies, we examine the linguistic resources used by these speakers as they work through different versions of how events unfolded. Explicit shifts in perspective are most often marked through manipulation of deictic frames and the use of quotative markers. At several points, however, perspective is left unmarked, giving rise to ambiguity as to who are the subjects of conceptualisation and who is the on-stage conceptualiser. The participants’ own explicit meta-talk around what was said and what it means, demonstrates that they are keenly oriented to these complex shifts in perspective and how they are being expressed. Contributing to the complexity is the multi-modal aspect of the reported series of interactions – face-to-face and mediated via text message. The multi-layered reporting and voice embedding is rendered even more complex due to deception of the one boyfriend whereby the agentive roles of animator, author and principal of the communicative actions are separated, blurred and manipulated. This presentation also provides an opportunity to explore how these poly-lingual young people use the nationally salient variety of Indonesian youth language known as *bahasa gaul* ‘language of sociability’, inflecting it with linguistic resources from the local regional language, Sundanese, to engage in what may seem quite frivolous talk, but which in fact is an important display of intersubjective understanding and mutual efforts in the maintenance of interpersonal relationships.