

LEXICAL BUNDLES IN WHATSAPP CONVERSATION BETWEEN NATIVE AND NON-NATIVE SPEAKERS OF ENGLISH

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Abstract - *The paper draws on an investigation on the use of lexical bundles and their functions in WhatsApp conversations between a native and a non-native speaker of English. The aim of this study is to explore the lexical bundles used by the two speakers in order to explain how these bundles contribute to the coherence in the conversations. The study employs the lexical bundle taxonomy by Biber et al. (1999) and the functional types of lexical bundles by Conrad and Biber (2005). In terms of functions, the lexical bundles produced by native and non-native speakers of English mostly express Stance between the speaker and hearer which includes functions of epistemic stance and attitudinal/modality stance to show intention, desire, ability, obligation, and directive. The Discourse Organizing function is also used, particularly to introduce and elaborate the topic; while, the Referential Expression type is not very much used in the conversation. The pedagogical implication of this study is that a wide variety of lexical bundles to express various functions in communication should be explicitly taught to develop the communicative competence of English language learners.*

Keywords - WA conversations, lexical bundles, discourse functions, discourse analysis

I. INTRODUCTION

Conversation is a talk between two or more people in which thoughts, feelings, and ideas are expressed, questions are asked and answered, or news and information is exchanged (Cambridge dictionary online, 2018). There are two main types of conversation,

transactional conversation and interpersonal conversation (Celce-Murcia, 2007). Transactional conversation has a communicative purpose to get something done. This includes a conversation between a doctor and a patient, a shop attendant and a customer, a waiter and a guest. While, interpersonal conversation aims at establishing and/or maintaining interpersonal relationship. This type of conversation includes chit chat or small talk between friends at a campus corridor while waiting for a class. Conversation happens not only face-to-face but also commonly happened through other means of communication such as WhatsApp (WA). WA is a messenger application, free to download for smartphones and desktops, which facilitates people to communicate very easily and fast by sending messages, images, audio, or video.

In conversing, people use formulaic language, like lexical bundles. A lexical bundle is a bundle defined as a recurring sequence of three or more words (Biber et al., 1999) functioning as a cohesive device to make a coherent conversation. Majority of studies on lexical bundles derived their data from written register, such as research articles which explore the use of lexical bundles in introduction of research articles (Jalali & Moini, 2014), research abstracts (Ahmadi, Ghamsooly & Fatemi, 2013), acknowledgements (Demirel & Ahmadi, 2013), and lexical bundles in research articles on Biology (e.g., Cardinali, 2015).

In the field of teaching English as a foreign language, conversation between English native speakers and non-native English speakers have been studied with

various foci of investigation, including communication strategies (Notash & Karafan, 2012), repair strategies (Rabab'ah, 2013), and speech acts (Ilyas & Khushi, 2015). However, investigation on spoken lexical bundles has been little explored.

The analysis of WA conversation in the present study is based on several reasons. WA chats are authentic research data. The conversations were not elicited for the sake of the research, but they were naturally occurring data. The research was important to be conducted considering that lexical bundles help interlocutors to ease the communication in a natural setting. Few, if any, studies have attempted to examine what formulaic language used by speakers which makes the conversation run smoothly and coherently. Therefore, this study aims to identify and explore lexical bundles in WA chats in order to explain how these bundles function in the conversation.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Definitions of Lexical Bundles

Some linguistic features are important for creating effective and coherent conversation. One of the features is the use of lexical bundles. Lexical bundles were originally introduced by Biber et al. (1999) as frequency-based units of formulaic language. They are recurrent sequences of three or more words (Biber et al. 1999). The present study has been underpinned by the main assumption that "the acquisition of the notion of formulaicity provides a great deal of help for EFL learners to achieve native-like language proficiency" (Assassi & Benyelles, 2016, p. 163). Competent users of a language will actually use more complex word forms and combinations to appear fluent and reach a native-like proficiency.

By taking a close look into definitions of formulaic language, in this study we follow Biber et al.'s *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* (1999) that lexical bundles refer to a sequence of three to four words that recur frequently in corpus-based discourse, both written and verbal. Lexical bundles are not complete grammatical units and are not idiomatic in meaning; they are used to build connection between ideas in a given discourse, as grammatical devices functioning as connecting signals among ideas in a text (Pang, 2010). Lexical bundles "that are present in written and spoken registers were considered as basic building blocks for constructing spoken and written discourse" (Biber & Conrad, 1999, p. 188).

Conrad and Biber (2005) classified the lexical bundles in two major ways. First, the bundles are categorized in terms of the structural characteristics, and the second categorization is based on their function in a discourse (See Biber et al., 1999; Conrad & Biber, 2005 for detail explanation and examples of the structural patterns of the bundles). The structural patterns of lexical bundles are not the focus of this study as the objective of the study is to explore what lexical bundles used and how these bundles function in their contexts. In this regard, the term 'lexical bundles' used in this present study follows the term defined by Biber et al (1999), that lexical bundles are English recurrent word combinations.

B. Previous Studies on Lexical Bundles

There have been a number of studies focusing on the investigation of lexical bundles found in particular registers, both spoken and written. Lexical bundles studies have become a topic of high interest because of the functional contribution to the development, coherence and organization of different texts, either spoken or written, (Biber et al., 2004; Cortes, 2004; Hyland, 2008a, 2008b, Jalali & Zarei, 2016).

In written register, a body of research on lexical bundles have shown that there are variations in the use and function of lexical bundles in different text types and disciplines. For example, Güngör and Uysal (2016) explored the use of lexical bundles in research articles in the field of educational sciences. They adopted corpus linguistics as the methodology in their research in which the source of the data were collected from peer-reviewed journals by considering the criteria, namely topic, text type and author profile. Using the structural taxonomy of Biber et al. (1999) and Hyland's (2008) functional taxonomy, Güngör and Uysal (2016) conducted a comparative analysis of lexical bundles used by native and non-native English scholars in educational journal articles. The research was aimed to determine the shared and distinct uses of lexical bundles by native and non-native scholars in writing research articles in educational sciences. The research reveals that distinct uses of lexical bundles by native and non-native scholars are dominating than the shared uses of lexical bundles.

Similar to Güngör and Uysal (2016), Kwari, Ratri and Artha (2017) conducted a study on the structural forms and functional classifications of lexical bundles in journal articles across four academic disciplines: health sciences, life sciences, physical sciences, and social sciences. The prominent finding of

their study showed that in terms of functional classification, the number of referential expressions is a lot higher than those of discourse organizers and stance expressions. They inferred that the high frequency of lexical bundles in the referential expressions can be related to the needs to refer to theories, concepts, data and findings of the study.

Jalali and Zarei (2016) have investigated written academic genres from the perspective of lexical bundles. The study aimed to search the way in which the target bundles in the applied linguistics area were used by two groups of EFL post graduate students as novice discourse community members in the same area. The findings show that postgraduate students were able to use target bundles as published writers did.

In addition, many studies on lexical bundles in spoken registers particularly in academic setting have been conducted. For example, Chan, Tan, and Kashiha, (2014) conducted a lexical bundles study on university students' group discussions. The aim of the study was to discover the most frequent lexical bundles used by university students in group discussions and to analyze the structural and functional types of the bundles. The participants of this research were the undergraduate university students from University Putra Malaysia who had English language proficiency courses. The researchers only focused on finding out three and four-word lexical bundles which then classifying the bundles into their structures and meanings.

Conrad and Biber (2005) conducted a study of the differences of the frequency and use of lexical bundles in conversation and academic registers. The study investigated whether there are multi-word sequences that were used with high frequency in texts, whether different registers tend to use different sets of these sequences, and, if so, to what extent the bundles fulfill discourse functions and thus play an important part in the communicative repertoire of speakers and writers. The findings suggest that first there even are multi-word sequences used with a high frequency by speakers and writers within particular registers. Second, in fact that different registers rely on different sets of lexical bundles, and finally that the bundles have important discourse functions that fit the context and purposes of the registers in which they are common.

This present research fills the gap in the way that this study aims at analysing the lexical bundles used by two speakers in WA conversations, one is a native speaker and another one is a non-native speaker of English, in order to explain the lexical bundles that are

frequently used by the speakers and prevalent functional types of the bundles.

III. METHODS

This is an exploratory study employing a discourse analysis approach to identify the use of lexical bundles and their functions in WA conversation between a native and a non-native speaker of English. Therefore, the units of analysis in this study are lexical bundles. The data were analysed based on Biber et al.'s categorization of lexical bundles in conversation (Biber, 1999 as developed by Biber & Berbieri, 2007), and Conrad and Biber's functional categorization of lexical bundles (2005).

The data were derived from naturally-occurring WA conversation between a native speaker (NS *Fab* - pseudonym) and a non-native speaker (NNS *Yun* - pseudonym) who are English language teacher professionals. The two interlocutors were colleagues, meaning that they had collegiate and friend relationships, working at the same department of a local university when the conversations happened. The chats happened in the period of nine months from October 2015 until June 2016 covering topics of everyday talks, academic and personal issues as well.

The WA chats were firstly exported to email and converted into Word format. The original chats consist of images and chats, and considering that the focus of the present study was to investigate the occurring lexical bundles, therefore, the images were deleted from the data. The corpus data were then analyzed through the following stages: (1) identifying the utterances potentially containing lexical bundles, (2) classifying the utterances produced by the native speaker and non-native speaker, (3) identifying the lexical bundles, (4) categorizing the lexical bundles into their discourse functions, and (5) interpreting the findings.

The data analysis employed investigator triangulation. According to Fusch, Fusch and Ness (2018), investigator triangulation involves using several different investigators in the analysis process. The initial findings from each investigator (Author 1 and Author 2) were then compared to open up interpretation on the findings.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section explains the use and functions of lexical bundles in the WA conversation between a NS and a NNS. In terms of the functions, the frequently recurring functions of the lexical bundles are first, *Stance bundles*

which include sub-categories as Epistemic Stance, Attitude/Modality Stance expressing desire, directive, intention, and ability. The second frequent function is *Special conversational bundles* which include sub-categories such as expressing politeness and simple inquiry. The less frequent function of the lexical bundles occurred in the conversation is *Discourse Organizers* both expressing topic introduction and topic elaboration. And, *Referential Expressions* function type is the least used in the conversation.

The finding also shows that the NS produces more lexical bundles than that of NNS of English. This finding was not surprising as the NS was likely a more competent speaker compared to the Indonesian speaker. However, the data analysis indicates that the NNS used the lexical bundles appropriately, meaning that she did not overuse, lack use, nor misused the bundles. It might be because of the background of the NNS, that is, a lecturer of the English language. Therefore, it could be inferred that she was a competent speaker of English.

In the following, I provide some examples of the lexical bundles used by the speakers of the WA chats based on the most frequently used to the least used bundles.

A. Stance Bundles

As previously mentioned, the most recurring functional type of lexical bundles used by both NS and NNS is Stance Expressions. This function includes Epistemic Stance expressing certainty/uncertainty and probability/possibility and Attitudinal/Modality Stance which consists of expressions to show desire, obligation/directive, intention/prediction, and ability.

Below are some examples of lexical bundles functioning as Epistemic Stance:

NS: *I was never told* about this before.

NS: *I may go to* Jogja on the Christmas weekend.

NNS: *I think that* we should give a chance to all.

NNS: *I am thinking of* offering you those dates.

Epistemic stance bundles include personal expressions which Biber et al. (2004) noted as expressing the degree of certainty, functioned as an intention or prediction.

The following are the examples of lexical bundles functioning as Attitude Stance:

NS: Excellent! *I will be there at* about 2. I have a makeup class today.

NS: *I will be there on* the 3rd floor of our building.

NNS: I will schedule you on Monday.

NS: *I will copy you on it* when I send it.

NS: *I will give a* final answer after I see the schedule.

NNS: *I will soon email you* the schedule draft and you can put yourself on the time that fits you.

These bundles were used by the speakers to show their intention and desire, or predict future events.

Examples of lexical bundles functioning as Attitude Stance-Ability

NS: In these questions, what is the prompt that guides the students to pick the correct choice? *I cannot see it.*

NS: I also do not mind at all going alone, since *I can always meet* people and make friends in the group.

NNS: *I can schedule you* the same time either on Monday or Tuesday.

NS: *I do not want to have* to cancel my classes and change my regular activities with students.

NS: *I cannot receive* money for this.

NS: *I would choose C*, but all these sentences contain mistakes.

NNS: *Hope you can come* so that you will gain the experience of it.

NNS: *You can have* your own materials.

In line with the study carried out by Conrad and Biber (2005), the functional types of bundles commonly found in the conversations are those reflecting a communicative purpose to convey personal thoughts and attitudes.

B. Special Conversational Bundles

The next function carried by the lexical bundles produced by NS and NNS in the WA conversation is special conversational functions referring to politeness, simple inquiry, and reporting functions. These functions are realized by varying structural patterns of lexical bundles, such as from the most to the least recurring functions: Yes-no questions expressing simple inquiry, verb phrase with active verb representing politeness functions, and Wh-questions referring to simple inquiry function.

Examples of simple inquiry by NS:

Can we do it before 9?

Can you schedule me for Dec 14 in the morning?

Would it be possible to schedule me again for Tuesday next week at the same time?

What time would work for you and him?

Simple inquiry by NNS:

Would you be available and say hello to them?

Would the time be okay for you?

Can I have your materials for speaking class?

What time are you leaving for the airport?

Politeness by NS:

Thank you for the documents you sent me.

I am very thankful for your assistance and actions, and I am sure they will help.

Wow, I can't believe this. These are great gifts. Thank you so much!

Have a great lunch!

Example of Politeness by NNS:

Thank you for letting me know about it.

Thank you for your help.

Thank you so much for taking part in our teacher training program.

Have a nice time.

Special conversational bundles are relatively a new category in the research on lexical bundles in spoken language including casual conversation. Simple inquiry are peculiarly related to asking information and confirmation. Politeness was mostly used at the end of the chats as expressions of thanking or the speakers would end the conversations. This function was employed by the speakers as they have a collegial relationship. This tenor has made the speakers use special bundles to show their politeness.

C. Discourse Organizer Bundles

These bundles have two major functions: topic introduction/focus and topic elaboration/clarification. Topic introduction bundles were used as a point of departure for the speakers to initiate their turns in the conversations.

Examples of Topic Introduction Bundles:

NNS: *I'm sorry to disturb. Where are you now? Bu Galuh brings you 'jamu'.*

The speaker uses the bundle "*I'm sorry to*" to start a conversation, which then is followed by giving information.

NS: *I was supposed to fly back to SMG from PKU yesterday afternoon, but my flight was cancelled because of the haze. Garuda rescheduled me for this morning, but the flight was again cancelled.*

The bundle "*I was supposed to*" is used by the speaker to open the channel of conversation.

NS: *As I told you*, these incidents have affected me a bit by showing me the limitations of my own living space, and I am starting to change my mind about what may be best.

The bundle "*As I told you*" is used by the speaker to start a conversation.

Examples of Topic Elaboration Bundles:

NNS: Another alternative is that we will take them to see your class. *Would that be okay?*

The bundle "*Would that be okay?*" is used by the speaker to ask for clarification to the hearer about the previously mentioned information.

NNS: To continue talking about the Dilli candidates, should they be government officers/civil servants (PNS)? We have 5 young lecturers but 3 of them are not yet PNS. *What do you think?* The bundle "*What do you think?*" is used by the speaker to ask for clarification of the previously stated information.

In the WA conversation in this study, the findings have strongly indicated that the conversations are coherent, meaning that the conversations make sense. The NS and NNS cooperated to ensure that they achieve the overall purposes of the chats, by employing discourse organizer bundles, such as: *as I told you*, *do you know if*. These bundles are very useful to make the flow of information smooth.

D. Referential Bundles

The finding demonstrates that the least used bundles in the conversations is referential bundles. Chan, Tan and Kashiha (2014) explain that referential bundles "generally functioned as identifying entities or specifying particular attributes of the entities to be important" (p. 7). The sub-functions of these bundles are: specification of attributes, identification/focus, and time/place/topic reference.

There were almost no bundle referring to place (e.g. *She's in that...uh... office down there... at the end of the hall*) and text-deixis bundles (e.g. *As shown in Figure 4.4*).

The finding of this present study shows that referential stance bundles are the least used in the conversations. Referential stance bundles, such as: *in the event in*, *at the start of*, *at the start of*, *at the table in front of the*. This might be because the content or subject matter of the conversation seems not need many lexical items expressing time, place, or text-deixis.

This finding is different from the data found by Chan, Tan and Kashiha (2014) which investigated the use of lexical bundles in students' group discussions. They found that "referential bundles were the most prevalent functional category and accounted for more than half of the bundles in group discussions." (p.7). Group discussions and informal conversation are two different types of discourse. In group discussions in the university classes like in the study of Chan, Tan and Kashiha (2014) the field or the subject matters are clear. The students talked a specific topic of discussion to

comprehend the learning materials, so referential bundles which refer to text-deixes should occur more frequently, while in the WA chats the topic of discussions are likely not specific, so there is almost no text-deixes bundles.

The WA chats as the source of data in this study are informal conversations which involved two individuals, a NS and a NNS. As a body of research on a large amount of spoken discourse suggests that in informal conversation, interpersonal meaning mostly happens. Interpersonal meaning brings interpersonal function in the conversation which signals speakers' attitudes toward what they say. In conversations, a wide range of uses of lexical bundles carry modal meanings such as epistemic modality (concerned with degrees of certainty and possibility). Therefore, the lexical items expressing stance bundles happen more frequently than the other functions. All these lexical bundles carry important information about the stance and attitude of the speakers as the aspect of interpersonal meaning. In the Hallidayan model of register (2004) this interpersonal meaning form a part of the tenor of the conversation. Interpersonal meaning - as realized in the use of stance lexical bundles - is fundamental in the creation of the conversation. This is asserted by Thornbury (2005, p. 66) that "conversation is not simply the exchange of information, but has a strong interpersonal function."

V. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study highlights the importance of the use of lexical bundles between a native and a non-native speaker of English as the bundles contribute to the flow of information in the conversation. The non-native speaker of English, who is a lecturer of the English language, seems to be using the bundles effectively. The findings of this study could be used to inform the development of Speaking Skills course, particularly the course of Transactional and Interpersonal Conversations. An initial suggestion is that for an activity English learners could be explicitly taught these lexical bundles by exposing them to many samples or conversation models of the bundles' use in contexts. Learners can also be asked to try to infer the functions of the bundles in given contexts.

This study is not meant to be generalized for all native speakers of English nor all non-native speakers. This study was a case, i.e. a selection of conversations to provide readers knowledge on the importance of lexical bundles to creating smooth and coherent conversation. Despite the need for further research, the findings of this

study provide deeper insights about how English language learners could develop and improve their competence in the language by using a wide variation of lexical bundles.

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