

Conference Paper

Pragmemic Triggers in the Acehese Commensality

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Abstract

Food is one of the ways through which humans make meaningful connections and hospitality with each other. Commensality is one of the social events of people to eat together that involves linguistic acts from the public to the intimate. The Acehese culture in commensality is the way to honor guests by inviting them to eat together to show the host's hospitality. This qualitative study is about the Acehese language use functions in commensality. In this study the linguistic formula called 'pragmemic triggers' by Beeman (2014) was applied. Pragmemic triggers are speech acts which move the participants by stages through the ritual process and back to the external world that they accomplish social action. The result indicates eight stages with seven transitions between stages and seven pragmemic triggers that initiate these transitions which have the same structure and use based on the pragmemic triggers formulas by Beeman (2014). However, the act of commensality is transformative of social relations as the way to make connections between one another.

Keywords: Pragmemic Triggers, Acehese, Commensality, Food

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1. Introduction

Food is essential for human biological survival. All people eat and drink, as all people live and die. Food is more than just a nutrient and it does not end in filling the stomach. Also, language is not only a tool to transmit information. Both food and language are made by building larger units out of smaller entities: ingredients make dishes make meals and sound make words make utterances make text (Halliday's analogy in Gerhardt, 2013:4). Food consumption and language use depend on the social context and their use by people in specific moments for their meaning. Food and language are part of social activity through which people construct their lifeworlds by displaying

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stances, identities, shared values, belief, etc. (Szatrowski, 2014: 4). There is a connection between 'eating food' and 'language use' as two fundamental human social acts. Physically, while food enters the body through the mouth, languages leaves the body through the same cavity in its primary, spoken form (Swadesh, 1971 in Gerhardt, 2013).

Food items are produced or acquired, transformed through cuisine rules and combined with other dishes in expected arrangements to comprise eating events. There is a process of moving from nature to culture. That is why only human can flavor their food and create unique dishes and food styles [7]. Food is a bridge between nature and culture and so is language (Fischler, 1988 in Gerhardt, 2013: 1). The way someone speaks and what he eats are not based on his choice but also on the society and the place in the society he lives in. For example, the distribution of meals that father gets is served first and dinner talk in having meals together in families to socialize the children into value systems about language related and food related behavior. Therefore, the meaning of food is an exploration of culture through food. It is a form of communication which tells what someone consumes, how he acquires it, who prepares it, who is at the table and who eats first that is rich in meaning [16].

Further, each culture has its own distinct foodstuffs and language which can be used to describe the cultural behaviors and identity of its people. The famous aphorism of Brillat-Savarin (1926), a French gastronome, in Szatrowski (2014: 5) "*Dis-moi ce que tu manges, je te dirai ce que tu es.*" 'Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are.' also shows the connection between food and identity. That is why foodways can only be understood holistically, with every aspect of human life taken into account (Anderson, 2014: 7), in this study linguistically.

A number of research studies related to food and language have been conducted on various food and languages in the world, such as cooking vocabularies [11], eating and drinking verbs [15], taste and flavor in Southeast Asia [6], the connection between language and sense [13], role of food in workplace discourse [9], food metaphor [12], Boholano culinary linguistics which is about Philippine's food and language [10]. However, a number of studies showing how language use functions in relation to food include speech acts concerned with the offering of food and drinks to guests that is strongly dependent on cultural norms [18], the analysis of instrumental family dinner talk [3], the relation between language and food family dinner table talk [4] and the stages of commensality that participants pass through when going from the outside world to the meal that compares the passage to the meal in four cultures, namely Middle East, Japanese, German and American [2]. This study adapted the linguistic formulas created by Beeman (2014), i.e. 'Pragmemic Triggers', to demonstrate how language use functions to the meals passage in the Acehnese culture.

2. Literature Review

Commensality is the social event of people eating together (Beeman, 2014:32). Eating together is a powerful act which is one of the most basic human social acts. It is the activity which is defined by eating and drinking together in common physical or social setting. It means that food and drink play a central role in hospitality in every culture. It can show the host's hospitality by inviting the guest to eat together as the most basic form of human's social action. The culture of eating together or commensality is closely related to the culture of the people of Aceh which is often called *khanduri*.

Food and commensality can foster relationships which are the key to build social relationships (Stajcic, 2013: 8; Barthes, 2004 in Mufidah, 2012: 159). Therefore, according to Beeman (2014: 32), if one rejects an invitation to eat, he or she also refuses a social relationship. The culture of eating together or also called *khanduri* in Acehnese is also part of the custom shown in the Acehnese term '*Pemulia Jamee adat geutanyoe*'. It is defined as honoring guests by inviting them to eat together to show hospitality. It also shows the embodiment of a human's faith. The Acehnese tradition of honoring guests includes the relation of humanitarian and religious dimensions [8].

Furthermore, the Acehnese custom also regulates how to invite someone to eat together and manner as a form of politeness. It involves a demonstration of how to call guests or body movements (Eriksson, 2009 in Gerhardt, 2013: 32) and also includes some of the stages that guests will be moved during the meal [2]. So the speech when letting guests eat or drink is also very dependent on the cultural norms of a community [18]. This is similar to the opinion of Darwis (2011: 128) that the way a person eats or how to invite a meal will show whether or not someone is paying attention to manners.

Commensality is a social ritual in which kinship relations, social hierarchy and the passage from the public 'outside' to the intimate 'inside' are negotiated by stages [2]. The movement from the everyday world to the state of commensality is pragmatic. According to Beeman (2014), pragmemes can be seen as meaningful linguistic and behavioral acts in social and cultural life. That is why Beeman (2014) used the term "pragmemic trigger" which moves the participants by stages through the ritual process and back to the external world in a transformed state. The passages are divided into three elements, namely (1) the 'states' between which actors move, (2) the 'transitions' between states, (3) the pragmemic triggers that initiate the transitions between states. There are eight stages with seven transitions between stages and seven pragmemic triggers that initiate these transitions in analyzing the social rituals of movement to the place of commensality. The stages are summarized in the table below.

TABLE 1: Stages of commensality and their pragmatic triggers (Beeman, 2014: 34).

Stage	Pragmemic trigger	Transition
The "outside world"	The invitation	Outside world to threshold
The "invited state"	Greeting/Welcome	Crossing the threshold
The "gathering place"	Summons to "the table"	Passage to "the table"
The "arrival at the table"	The signal to eat	Beginning the meal
Commensality	Invitation to leave "the table"	Leaving "the table"
The "post commensality activity"	Statement of departure	Departure (crossing the threshold)
The "departing place"	Expression of gratitude	Re-entry into the 'outside world'
The "reciprocating"	(Invitation)	(Passage from outside world to threshold)

As shown in Table 1, the pragmemic triggers in the middle column begin the transition in the right column to each new stage in the left column of the next row. The process starts over at the top when the 'reciprocating status' is reached. It is a cyclical process.

3. Research Method

This study utilized a qualitative descriptive method by describing the Acehese language functions in commensality. It focused on the stages of commensality that participants pass through when going from the outside world to the meal and back. It adapted set linguistic phrases that serve as "pragmemic triggers" for each stage which is introduced for the first time by Beeman (2014).

The three stages in this research were data collection, data analysis, and presentation of the data analysis results. The data source was the speakers of the Acehese language selected based on certain criteria including the native speakers of Aceh, physically and mentally healthy, understanding and mastering the culture of Aceh. In collecting the data, interview and observation methods were used in accordance with the research requirements.

4. Discussion

Pragmemic triggers are the utterances that signal the transitions from one stage to another. The analysis of social rituals of movement to the place of commensality by using 'pragmemic triggers' formula [2] has identified eight stages with seven transitions that move participants from the outside world to commensality and back to the outside world. The study analyzed the Acehnese utterances to show the functionality of the expressions and the symbolic used in the formulation of these expressions.

4.1. The "outside world" and departures from it

It is the everyday outside world which is a social construct (Schuetz, 1945 in Beeman, 2014:34). People transform the world of everyday life through the construction of special events. As Beeman (2014) described that the individual departs into different cognitive framed events to understand the passage into and out of specialized social and cultural, such as commensality.

4.1.1. The invitation

Invitation can move people from the everyday world into the world of commensality. Invitation is a simple oral informal or formal written message in the Acehnese culture. The purpose of invitation is related to the kinds of commensality. There are commensality invitations to the host's close relatives, friends or guests they respect. However, there are also invitations for big events such as the life cycle of eating together (birth, wedding, death).

The instance of the invitation for close friends or relatives in oral invitation is as follows:

singoh leuho neumeulangkah u rumah lon, neu pajoh khanduri sira ta duek-duek ta meuproh haba

'Please come to our house tomorrow, let's eat together and chit chat there'.

The time of an invitation is generally mentioned such as for lunch or dinner. However, the invitation for a big event of commensality such as wedding party or life cycle events is for example:

nyoe uroe Sabtu neuk khanduri meukawen si dara lon, man neu meulangkah u rumah, meunyoe na aneuk-aneuk ngen meulinte sigoe

'This Saturday, please come to my daughter's wedding party. Please inform all members of your family'.

Some people bring *ranup* 'betel leaves' to the invited people while inviting them to the wedding party.

4.2. Transit: Outside world to threshold – The “invited state”

The invited people should respond to an invitation whether they want to accept or reject it. When those people accept the invitation to a commensal event, it means that their social status changes because there is the bonding to a future event of commensality.

4.2.1. Pragmemic trigger: Greeting/Welcome

When the invited people are close to the time and place of the commensality event, they cross physically into the place of gathering. Also, it involves a verbal greeting between the hosts and the guests and exchange of gifts.

In Acehnese, the host welcomes the guest by answering the 'salam':

Walaikumsalam. Piyoh..Neu meulangkah u dalam

'and unto you peace, please come in'.

The guests of men and women shake hands of the same gender. Then, they take off their shoes and present a gift to the host which is based on the kind of commensality events.

4.3. Transit: Crossing the threshold – The “gathering place”

The guests gather at some point where in many societies the social gathering or commensal space is the same. However, it can be transformed into the other by a change in furniture. In the Acehnese traditional house, the commensal space is at *seramoe keu* 'living room'. The guest can be served at the same room (*seramoe keu*) or at the other room (*seramoe likot*).

4.3.1. Pragmemic trigger: Summons to “the table”

When all the guests have gathered, the host makes an announcement that the meal is to be served. The announcement involves a performativity and pragmatically situated speech act. In the Acehnese culture, there is a social ranking that guides the movement to the table. For example, the priest is going first in the commensal meal like life cycle commensality or father (man) also goes first in commensality at home.

If the guests are already seated in the commensal space, plates, glasses and eating utensils have been placed before the plates of food. The host ushers the guests to the table from another space or the same space by using a verbal act, for example:

Nyoe neulangkah u seuramoe likot, neu pajoh khanduri bacut bah pih ngen sira

'Come to *seuramoe* (dinning) room, please serve yourself, do not hesitate.

4.4. Transit: Passage to "the table" – The "arrival at the table"

The guests take their commensal place and are prepared to eat. In the Acehnese society, men and women are not allowed to sit together while enjoying their commensal food, especially one who is not married yet. Occasionally, men go to eat first and then women follow. The tables for the foods are different between men and women.

4.4.1. Pragmemic trigger: The signal to eat

The signals that the guests begin to eat in the Acehnese society is commenced by washing hands in the basin (*glok*) before eating and then followed by saying *Bismillahirrahmanirahim* 'in the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful'. Sometimes, the signal is started by the host who gives kind words to please the guest to start eating.

Neusilahkan neurasa pue yang ka kamoe tagun nyoe... masen ngen masam bek neukira..bek male-male beh.. boh kajeut bismillah..

'Let's eat' (figurative language).

4.5. Transit: Beginning the Meal - Commensality

There are some table manners which are different between one society and another. They are the reflection of cultural attitudes and social practice such as status, aesthetics, rank and purity values. The activities that take place in the commensality frame are largely rule-governed [2]. Some societies allow conversation while eating, while other societies prefer silence or minimal conversation while enjoying the commensal food. These also apply in the Acehnese society. The guests should not make intense conversation while eating and those commensal participants should wait for the priest to finish his meal, and then they can clean their hands after the priest in the commensal activity. The priest and respected guest may go to eat first and finish it first, and then other commensal participants follow. It shows the politeness of the commensal participants.

4.5.1. Pragmemic trigger: Invitation to leave “the table”

When the commensal guests are finished, they are invited to move to another room or the commensal food may be removed from the table. In the Acehese society, the guests signal that they have finished eating by saying *Alhamdulillah* ‘Praise be to God’ and washing their hands. It is important to note that the commensal participant should wait for the priest, respected guests or the older one to finish their meal, and then they can wash their hands.

The guest is common to say a good response to the food that is served by the host. The guest can say:

Alhamdulillah, cit meukeunong that pue yang ka neuhidang keu kamoe nyoe ‘Alhamdulillah, Praise be to God, ...this food is delicious’.

4.6. Transit: Leaving “the table” – The “post commensal activity”

According to Beeman (2014), in many cultures there are activities following a meal; for example, entertainments, games, further conversation and other amusements can prolog the event. In the Acehese society, there are activities after a meal such as further conversation with food and drink continuing to be served.

4.6.1. Pragmemic trigger: Statement of departure

There is a conversation activity continuing for a while before the guests prepare to leave. Mostly, the guests are served with tea, coffee or cake in this activity. The guests commence the departure with a pragmemic expression as a time signal for departure. The instance of the expression is as follows:

Kamoe meujak woe, pue na leubeh kureung neupeumeuah. Nyoe kamoe meujak gisa teuma man neupeumeuah ka hek drone meususah payah neu jak meuhidang keu kamoe (‘thank you for the food and hospitality’).

Normally, the host expresses some reluctance to let the guests leave, *bek neu wo dile..preh siat teuk* (‘do not leave..stay for a while’).

According to Beeman (2014), the pragmemic trigger for departure consists of a series of verbal and behavioral routines for leave taking in the following structure: (1) the guests announce that they are leaving and the reason for it, (2) there is a response from the host to stay longer, (3) the routine of putting on shoes and outdoor clothing to emerge into the “ordinary world”, (4) chitchat at “the threshold”, (5) eventual departure.

In the Acehnese culture; leave taking is accompanied by hugs and handshake between people of the same sex and promises to meet again:

beuteugeh bak jalan, beuseulamat neu jak ngen wo... Insyallah, meunyo na umu ta meureumpok lom, ('be careful on your way home, and see you again')

4.7. Transit: Departure (crossing the threshold) – The “departing place”

Mutual pleasantries about the event are exchanged with promises to meet again. It takes place at the threshold of the location of commensality.

4.7.1. Pragmemic trigger: Expression of gratitude

The guests express gratitude for the meal and the host for the guests who come to commensality. A final expression of gratitude to be expressed as the guests depart and re-enter the ‘ordinary world’ is as the following:

Nyoe teurimong genaseh beurayek that, kamoe kaleuh meurasa mandum pue yang ka neuhidang, ban mandum mangat... Insyallah, meunyo na umu neujak cit bak rumoh kamoe ('thank you for the delicious food, and we look forward to seeing you).

4.8. Transit: Re-entry into the “outside world” – The “reciprocating status”

The guests move again from the world of commensality into the everyday world. However, the social relationship between the member of guests and the host are changed. It is in line with Beeman (2014) who states that the commensal event changes the social universe permanently for all participants. Then, the guests express a final expression of gratitude as they depart and re-enter the ‘ordinary world’.

It is common that the commensal event denotes reciprocation as the obligation on all guests who attend to repeat the process in the future.

5. Conclusions

Commensality is eating together which is the most basic human social acts in order to make meaningful connections with each other. The rituals of commensality are interesting to be examined, which shows the structure how language use functions to carry out cultural transitions from setting to setting and scene to scene. The stages

move the commensal participants from the external world to an inner liminal space. The speech act to accomplish this social action that moves the participants by stages through the ritual process and back to the external world is called 'pragmemic triggers'. The result indicates eight stages with seven transitions between stages and seven pragmemic triggers that initiate these transitions which have the same structure and the use of these triggers is the same in the Acehnese society, meanwhile the form of it can be different between one society and another. In the Acehnese society, the commensality participants use speech acts to accompany their physical and behavioral action which is different based on the kinds of commensality they have. However, the Acehnese also use figurative language in their structure of speech.

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