

THE HAPPINESS CONTEXT IN THE INDONESIAN CULTURE (The Role of Sociolinguistics in Translating a Culture)

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Abstract: *This essay will discuss the interpretation of sociolinguistics in translating the culture of Indonesia regarding the happiness context. As an emotional concept, happiness or kebahagiaan in the Indonesian language has an ambiguity in articulation when someone perceives it as a conditional of a joyful one feels. Since the word has an ambiguity in meaning, the role of Sociolinguistics is significant in identifying what Indonesian people mean when they say aku bahagia (I'm happy). The main argument of this paper focuses on the term kebahagiaan in different situations and people. The first part of this essay will discuss the term of happiness in its global meaning and its correlation with the term of emotion. The second part addresses the term kebahagiaan in the Indonesian language and its derivation of meaning. The last part of the essay speaks about how to measure the concept of the word kebahagiaan the Indonesian people use in their daily life.*

Keywords: *Happiness, Emotion*

I. Introduction

The significant role of knowing the representation and processing of emotion words and concepts cannot be underestimated. Perceiving emotion in oneself and those of others commonly leads to a greater degree of positive mental and well-being. The needs for understanding emotion and concerning with the identification of emotional words are perhaps important to cross-culturally classify emotional words. Altariba (nd. cited in Altariba, et. al. nd.) states that it is commonly known that words that label emotion are often language-specific, that is, they are

difficult to translate into a single word or a group of words in another distinct language. Therefore, the representation of emotion to be qualified as “universal” seems to be a big challenge as every representative culture has its own way to present and articulate the emotional sense. For example, happiness as one of emotional sense which is experienced by all human being had been identified to be several assumptions regarding to the cultural colloquial.

As a universal sense, happiness can be identified as a state of feeling good in heart that leads human-being to be actively progressive in their life. Some studies have shown that people who are at the least mildly happy most of the time have more self-confidence and better relationship, perform better at work, are rated more highly by their superiors, are better creative problem solver, are more likely to volunteer or engage in altruistic behaviour, and make more money than their less happy counterparts. Jafaar (ed. nd.) asserts that the people who perceive themselves as a happy person can be acknowledged to be healthier and live longer than those who are facing less happy in their life.

On the other hand, special characteristics that human behave on their life might be actually caused by stage of happiness, the more a person feels happy the more good characters will cover and dominate his or her mind. Criminal news broadcasted via internet, television, and other mass media often indicated that the crimes were highly related to less happy villains gained in their life. Happiness in this term, therefore, is a key feature to shape the person’s good characteristics in order to stabilise their lives. It is likely that there is a psychological loop that reinforces itself, that success in marriage, work, and other life domains lead to continued happiness which, in turn, contributes to further success.

Thus, from this view, it can be argued that happiness does not simply feel good - it is actually good for the human spirit.

In modern era of the science of psychology, positive psychology had made understanding and facilitating happiness and subjective well-being as the central objective of its study. This paper will discuss happiness in terms of cultural notion in Indonesia. Happiness in Indonesian cultural context has several meanings, and level of happiness assumption is different from one to others. Happiness is still vague for some Indonesian as the word has many correlations with other words that are associated with it, and even happiness is argued as an abstract concept. Happiness, therefore, not just a word and state of mental stability, but it is a stage of an end-goal of human-being.

II. The Study of Happiness

In particular, the word "happiness" was taken from Greek concept of eudemonistic term. Eudemonia is a classical Greek word, commonly translated as happiness. Consisting of the word "*eu*" ("good" or "well-being") and "*daimōn*" ("spirit", used by extension one's fortune), it often refers to human flourishing. It was a central concept in ancient Greek ethics, along with the term "*arete*" ("virtue") and *phronesis* (practical or moral wisdom). Webster dictionary defines happiness as "a) state of well-being and contentment, joy; b) a pleasurable or satisfying experience" (Frank, 2010, 24). This emotional term is sometime simply defined as a condition in which someone senses "happiness" in his or her life despite the fact that the word happiness has many articulated meaning to be reckoned. When conducted to the cultural paradigm, "happiness" is rather an ambiguity concept. If asking a child who gets a new bike "are you happy?" he or she would reply:

“yes, I am happy”, but when examined further by reviewing the child’s life, then “happy” in this context is not a case.

Basically, in human daily life there are two emotional words that people would convey to express their happiness. The first is “pleasant”, this word is used to reflect a pleasurable sense when obtaining or pursuing something; and another one is “enjoy” which is used to express the “happiness” when doing something. The mental condition when obtaining a new bike for a child shows that he or she is so excited and pleasure that make him or her sensing a different kind of goodness in his or her mind. However, the pleasure here does not absolutely mean “happiness” as it just a state of mental situation by feeling a new good sense. Whereas a feeling of pleasure is derived by a person after getting or feeling something, “enjoy” is a mental condition perceived by someone when acting or doing something. For example, a child who enjoys a bike regardless of a new or old bike would experiences a kind of “happiness” in his or her mind, but is it a real happiness?

Both terms pleasant and enjoyment are often associated with the term “happy”. People who are in a mental condition of pleasant and enjoyment often assume themselves to be “happy”. Feeling pleasure and or enjoying something are not obviously as a considerable application of senses which are correlated with the term “happiness”. In some explanations of happiness, these two concepts cannot be said to be “feeling happiness”, because happiness itself has many different concepts and requires that such matters. Furthermore, according to Veenhoven (1984 cited in Jaafar, nd. 2) there are a few words which have synonym with the word happiness. These words include optimism, life satisfaction, well-being, global life-worth, life quality, hedonistic level, euphoria, elation, enjoyment and success in achieving life goals. All these

words reflect the happiness of an individual. Therefore, happiness is not bound to one word, interpretation or one specific definition.

III. Happiness in The Indonesian language

Like other languages, bahasa Indonesia has a variety of way to express its perspective of emotion. As a vast extended archipelago, Indonesia has no a custom culture regarding emotional perception. People from the eastern part of the country constitute a special meaning of emotional words that are not recognised by people who are in the western part and vice versa. This has been becoming a problem to Indonesian people even bahasa Indonesia as a lingua franca cannot completely solve the problem. Thus, studying happiness in Indonesia does not merely represent the whole Indonesian cultures. But generally, by looking back to bahasa Indonesia as the unity language of all Indonesians, the sense of emotional concept represented in modern Indonesian language can be understood similarly by all Indonesians. Although in some cases, this emotional concept often has different articulations in local culture.

Furthermore, the concept of emotional words as the universal sense cannot be proposed to perceive the unity perception of happiness among different cultures. According to Wierzbicka (1999) one potential problem with this universal sense of emotion is that not all languages have a word similar in function and meaning to “emotion”. Although each language has accepted the name of emotion to describe “the human feeling”, Indonesian language is likely to have distinction to categorise the emotional concept. Shaver (et. al. 2001, 6) states that there are two ways to refer to the emotion category in Indonesian language: *perasaan hati* and *emosi*. According to Indonesian sense, *perasaan hati* is more

approval to be addressed with the positive emotions like *bahagia* (happy), *cinta, suka* (love), and *senyum, gembira* (smile) rather than *emosi*. The term *emosi* can be either conducted with emotions in general as recognised by whole languages or more specially referred to negative emotions (as does English phrase: becoming emotional) such as *marah, geram* (angry), *putus asa* (less confidence), and *cemburu, curiga* (jealous). Happiness is lexically always connected with *perasaan hati* (the feeling of heart). Since heart is the main mind in the structure of the body spirit in Indonesian term, the happiness is ranked as the high level to measure the success of someone who had effectively controlled his or her mind. Therefore, happiness is categorised to be in high level of *perasaan hati* hierarchy.

What is happiness in Indonesian references? According to Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (Tim Penyusun KMBI, 2008), happiness (kebahagiaan) is: “*keadaan atau perasaan senang tenteram (bebas dari segala yang menyusahkan)*” (the state of feeling satisfaction and security, having no difficulty in the life). This lexical terminology does not represent the real meaning of happiness, because happiness as the feeling of the heart cannot be represented with only one word but spread over such practical words that have technical context. To view this extent in pursuing happiness in Indonesian language, it can be referred to these several technical words that have similarity to the meaning of happiness: 1. *Bangga, kagum* (respect, admiration); 2. *Asyik, sukacita, sukaria, bahagia, senang, girang, gembira, ceria, riang* (happiness, joy); 3. *Damai, aman, tenteram* (calmness, security); 4. *Lega, kepuasan, puas* (satisfaction, contentment); 5. *Berani, yakin* (boldness, confidence); 6. *Ikhlas, tulus* (feeling good about right action); 7. *Berbesar, berbesar hati* (justified pride); 8. *Rendah hati, sabar, tabah* (quiet, mature

confidence). These definitions show that the different aspects of happiness are given different importance by different people; the meaning of happiness in the ears of the listener. For some, it is an inflated term plastered on self-help books; for others, a way of living achieved by living in harmony with ourselves, events, conditions, people and environment around them.

IV. Measuring happiness in Indonesian cultural context

Translating cultural concept of the meaning of happiness in different countries seems to be a valued study to measure the rate of happiness cultural context. Layard (2003 cited in Zhengdao Ye, 2012) has proposed a question on whether the word “happy” means the same thing in different languages. Comparing cross-cultural meaning of happiness will not give a significant study of measuring the value of happiness in some countries if the word “happy” has the similar meaning to different languages. Generally, by using a scale running from “worst possible life to the best”, the ranking of happiness in such cultures can be rated according to “how happy they are”, “how satisfied they are”, and “what score they give to life. The ranking of countries is almost identical on all three measures.

The cultural concept of happiness (*kebahagiaan*) in Indonesian term lies on several perspectives. The attempting of this study is to investigate the meaning of happiness in Indonesia according to the eastern community. One of the characteristics of eastern society is a collectivistic society not an individualistic society. Thus, everything should be considered under the social value among the people. Happiness is then, in the Indonesian value, not a personal achievement but more generally cover all society. Although happiness can be persuaded personally, it is not

reflect the culture of Indonesia because one cannot ignore the important of taking care to others, or in other words someone cannot be justified as a happy person without contributing to others' happy. According to Jaafar (et. al. nd.), individualistic society simply means that the individuals' definition of happiness is closely linked to the kind of he or she lives in. Lu and Gilmour (2006) assert that the definition is more complex and dependent on culture values. Based on these views, it can be explained that the definition of happiness in a collectivistic societies is more community-centred whereas the definition in an individualistic society stresses towards the individual. As a result, Americans as the representative of western people view happiness as a right of every individual whereas most eastern people including Indonesia perceive happiness as a social relationship within society.

Conducted to semantic explication that Wibriezka and Goddard explained (Ye, 2012) the cultural happiness in Indonesia can be described as below:

"Someone takes care in other happiness"

someone feel something for some time
 because this someone thinks like this at this time:
 I know that I can be with some people at many times
 I feel something very good when I feel good to this people
 I feel something very good when I think about these people
 at the same time, I know that it is like this:
 these people feel something very good towards me
 these people often think about me
 these people want to do good things for me
 when this someone thinks like this, this someone feels something very good
 like people often feel when they think like this for some time
 it is good for this someone if it is like this

The explanation below will show how the word “*kebahagiaan*/happiness” is referred to Indonesian culture:

a. Wealth and happiness context

It is undoubtable that money play an important role in the human life. Many people argue that happiness is based on how much money you have and how you can overcome your economic problem with your wealth. But, are people more satisfied with their life because of their economic conditions or do happy people asses their economic condition favourably? Easterlin (1974 cited in Landiyanto et. al. 2010, 3) suggested a test for whether greater riches had made American happier. He looked at whether reported happiness rose as national income did. His paper concludes: “..... in the one time series studied, that for the United State since 1946, higher income was not systematically accompanied by greater happiness. This result would mean that economic growth fail to pay well-being.

In Indonesian context, when talking about the relation between happiness and wealth (*kebahagiaan dan kekayaan*), people does not intend to assume that the source of happiness is depend on wealth. Obviously, the value of goods or money would not buy well-being, but in the daily life conversation, the word happiness is always labelled to those rich people. Does happiness here has another meaning? The example below will give us what does *kebahagiaan/bahagia* means when coined with wealth:

“Budi adalah orang yang paling bahagia karena memiliki kekayaan yang melimpah. Dia tidak perlu lagi memikirkan kehidupan dan masa depannya”

(Budi is the happiest person as he has abundant wealth. He does not need to think about his life and his future).

“The happiest person in this context” is simply assumed as a person who can enjoy his life because of money they have. Happiness, then, is more as a way how to “enjoy” life rather than the state of feeling “happy” in the heart. However, wealth or income is not a sole factor in determining happiness, because some studies have shown that only a minimal correlation between money and happiness (for example; Diener et al., 1995) .When basic needs are met, a rise in income does not necessarily raise the level of one’s happiness. In other words, if a country achieves a certain standard of prosperity and if it becomes more prosperous, the level of happiness in the country rises only a little. Thus, the word “bahagia/happy” in some cases in Indonesian culture does not refer to happiness itself; it is likely a key word to show the joyful the one has regardless of his or her satisfaction and “happy”.

b. Happiness context in family relation

As a collectivistic society, family in Indonesian culture plays an important role in shaping its member according to the family’s regulation. According to Jaafar (et. al. n.d.) the results of their study over happiness in Indonesia shows that family is an important factor that brings happiness to the Indonesian. If one member of a family did a remarkable prestige, the impact will bring whole family members to be proud and “happy” and vice versa. For example, someone would say to success parents “you are the “happiest” parents because all your children graduated from excellent universities and succeeded to find a good job in the government” (*Engkau adalah orang tua yang paling “berbahagia” karena semua anakmu lulus dari perguruan tinggi yang terkenal dan berhasil mendapatkan pekerjaan yang baik di pemerintahan*).

The term “*bahagia/happy*” in this context means that parents are proud because their family members had gained a high status

in the society which is no everyone can afford that such prestige.

c. Happiness context in religion term

By religion human can expect to reach the happiness by practicing its teaching. All religions in the world suggest their followers to gain happiness in their life here in the world and the day-after. To the believers of the religion, following the spirit of the God is the peak of happiness where there is no the happiest state except to submit our live to the God (to be surrender before the Lord). Layard (2005 cited in Atherton et. al. (eds.) 2011) states that people who believe in God are happier.

In Indonesia, the most populous Muslim country in the world, the happiness that is related to the religion is (based on the Arabic phrase) called *sa'adah fid dunya wa sa'adah fi al-akhirah* (gaining happiness in the world as well as in hereafter). This kind of happiness is claimed as the best achievement in the life of human. According to Haidar Bagir (www.mizan.com), the teaching of Islam is linked with that of positive psychology regarding happiness concept. In the positive psychology, every human-being has a potential to be happy, the task of psychology is just to unleash that potential to achieve the happiness.

The sentence below shows the meaning of happiness which is related to the religion concept:

“Nak! kalau kamu ingin bahagia di dunia maka perbaiki ibadahmu, jaga hubunganmu dengan Tuhan dan perbanyak melakukan kebaikan dan hindari perbuatan-perbuatan yang dapat merusak”

(My son! If you want to be happy in your life take care of your worships, keep your mind upon the God, do frequently good deeds, and avoid things that can lead you to the doom).

The word “happy” in this context is related to the spirit term which is, for the believers, assumed as the high hierarchy of happiness. By following the spirit of religion one can control his or her mind and action, and absolutely to make heart more peacefully and securely.

V. Conclusion

Based on the analysis, the happiness in Indonesian culture has many conceptual meanings according to the context. The study of happiness will not represent all Indonesian perspectives as the country is vast extended archipelagos. By illustrating some of the ways the people express the word “bahagia/kebahagiaan” in different contexts, it is found that in economic term, “kebahagiaan/happiness” is mostly refer to “kenyamanan/joyful”; in the family context, the word is often correlated with “kebanggaan/pride”; and in religious context “kebahagiaan/happiness” is associated with the spiritual concept, and it is assumed as the top of happiness hierarchy.

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