



Revealing the Language Manipulation to “Spill the Tea” Among Millennial Teenagers on Twitter

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Abstract. Language is a medium of communication for expressing feelings, emotions, and information to be shared. It is possible that the meaning of the language used may change depending on the context, including the generation after years. Millennials, for example, invented the terms *spill the tea* with the emergence of the use of social media. This article studies the meaning behind the language manipulation of *spill the tea* used among millennials on Twitter. In order to reveal the language manipulation, this article used a qualitative method by distributing questionnaires and documentation to collect the data from several millennial accounts on Twitter. Thirty-seven respondents who have filled out the survey know all the language manipulation that has been presented. However, not all of them are comfortable using manipulation words in their daily conversations with their friends. It proves that the use of language manipulation, especially among millennials, does not only give a good impact on how netizens respond but also gives a negative tone to those who are uncomfortable seeing the words around them.

Keywords: Language manipulation · Social media · Twitter · Millennial

1 Introduction

Language becomes a system in which two or more people communicate with each other, and it is something that each person knows [1]. In today's society, the younger generation, such as millennials, tends to use language manipulation to reflect their identity or who they are, including how they value and feel upon something. According to Gee [2], human language serves many other functions, and the most related functions would be supporting social activities and identities within social groups; we may conclude that the language use may reflect the specific discourse of the users. Language manipulation appears spontaneously as the language offers specific designations and blurry and ambiguous meanings depending on the discourse. Language manipulation has two meanings either it conveys factual information or a lie (manipulation). One of the emerging cases is the term among millennials, 'I spilled the tea' which can be called a manipulation language because the audience (readers or listeners) cannot understand what the speakers are intended to convey nowadays. The trend of *spill the tea* itself has two different meanings. Statements intended as publicity for a particular event often

exaggerated or false due to the subjective intention of the speakers; this may lead to misinformation or biased conclusions about the information being conveyed.

Some previous studies about this case but on a different platform is already published. The first study was carried out by Wadi & Ahmed [3], who points out that the main problem is how a statement or text which may influence the readers or listeners will vary depending on their beliefs and how they interpret and comprehend a particular text. This study shows that language plays a crucial role in framing and shaping a new point of view and positioning the listeners' or readers' perceptions and attitudes. The results also prove that media messages are not neutral and biased (either true or lie) as they claim to be.

Next, Iswara & Bisena [4] focused on the use of language features to manipulate facts and describe their persuasive power in influencing the readers through acronyms, word reduction, and unconventional punctuation. This paper also limits the research just on one platform. The research explains more about persuasive power through the use of language manipulation and how manipulation is used in language features.

The difference between the previous and present studies is that the previous study utilized a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach and used newspapers to get the data. Meanwhile, this study uses questionnaire methods and Twitter as its platform to get the study results. This study concerns language manipulation as it refers to the use of language as media or a tool for communication. The subject of this study is millennials, who often use Twitter to communicate with their friends to share some information. Referring to the research questions, this study aims to reveal why millennials use language manipulation and what netizens think or respond to the use of language manipulation.

Language manipulation generally involves the usual forms of ideology and subjective intention, such as emphasizing the good things of the speakers and the bad things of the others [5]. In other words, language manipulation is a type of language influence used for hidden meanings, intentions, and purposes. When the speakers or writers use language manipulation, either consciously or unconsciously, it is intended to create particular reactions or attitudes from the audience toward the information. As in the case of using language manipulation consciously, the speakers possibly tell the true meaning of the language. However, the perception and understanding created by the audience are dependent on how the speaker uses the language [6].

Language is believed to indicate that speakers achieve the impact of their communication by using various methods such as distraction, misdirection, and reasonable reasoning (argumentation and advocacy) [7]. Thus, the use of language manipulation stated before is presented through arguments or ambiguous information. In addition, they (the speaker) are rather clever and masters in the art of rhetorical persuasion; they are capable of persuading huge crowds and are more powerful and could influence others' understanding and the way they think. From this understanding, it can be concluded that language manipulation is used as a strategy for someone to persuade the targeted audience to gain people's trust.

Language, communication, social activities, and the way of thinking and learning of the community are based on particular cultural patterns. As in this case, culture is related to the people's way of life. It means language, communication, and culture cannot

be separated; culture is a human possession that grows along with the development of human society [8]. In addition, culture not only determines who is talking (conveying the information) and where the communication is taking place, but it also determines to encode messages, meaning, and interpret the messages. Based on this theory, it can be concluded that culture is mainly concerning human life, especially the interaction and communication used.

There are various theories about the correlation between language and culture, especially dealing with meaning-making through social communication. Human language is a result of the long evolution of people, and somehow human language might be different from human cultures [2], in particular in the context of different timing or generation. However, language and culture have similarities because humans are basically the same. By all means, language is bounded by cultural context or an extension of the cultural context. It may affect perception and affect the thinking patterns of someone because if the language is being used for communication, it blends with the culture itself – language use in a particular context (language discourse). Furthermore, the language used may influence the culture and vice versa. Alternatively, like a coin, one side is the language, and the other is culture.

2 Methods

This study is intended to observe the use of language manipulation among teenagers on Twitter. This research is a qualitative descriptive study focusing on language manipulation as well as the reaction and responses of the audience (netizen) to the language manipulation used by millennials in particular to *spill the tea* culture among social media users. Data were collected by distributing questionnaires and documentation of the Twitter accounts ($N = 37$) selected through random sampling yet based on their age-related to the millennials community. Twitter is believed to be the most favored social media platform that supports freedom of speech with users of a heterogeneous community. The collected data were processed by classification and presented with descriptive analysis.

3 Results and Discussion

This section presents the questionnaire results and discusses the correlation between the authentic data obtained based on the theory related to the research. Some examples from the participant's Twitter accounts are also provided and included them as proof of the theory. Since the term *spill the tea* is a common term on Twitter nowadays, young millennials were asked if they knew the meaning of *spill the tea* on Twitter and whether they engage with this culture. Despite the fact that all participants or respondents know and are familiar with the meaning of the word *spill the tea*, only 10.8% of the respondents used such a communication strategy, which means only four respondents answered and 45.9% of the respondents ($N = 17$) admitted to use such communication occasionally as shown in Fig. 1.

Based on the initial question of whether the respondents understand the *spill the tea* communication, most of the respondents as Twitter users knew the meaning of the terms and made it as a trend to share some gossip with their circle. It is understood that the idea

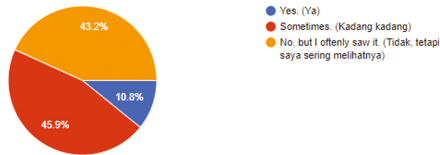


Fig. 1. Results of the questionnaire



Fig. 2. Millennials engage with the culture

is in line with Van Dijk's statement that language influence is used for hidden meaning [5]. Millennials used language manipulation to share some gossip about the emerging issues around them as shown by the tweets from the Twitter users of @pjin to @eun in Fig. 2.

User @eun tweeting about her feelings towards someone by using language influence to hide her intention. Whether she just wants to complain about someone's behavior or intended to create particular reactions or attitudes from the audience toward the information she just shared. For example, user @pjin looks curious about who she is talking about and replying under @eun tweets by using the term *spill the tea*.

From the example above, it can be seen that user @eun has her intention when she is tweeting using the language influence to create language manipulation, such as *spill the tea*. Whether she is doing it consciously or unconsciously, she is intended to create particular reactions from the audience [5]. Here is another example that millennials tend to use language manipulation to create a particular reaction from their audiences.

Millennials are more likely to use language manipulation to share some controversies or the happening issues around them at that time. Such responses relate to the manipulation function in which they (the speakers) are rather clever and masters in the art of rhetorical persuasion; they are capable of persuading huge crowds and are more powerful and could influence others' understanding and the way they think [7]. As provided in Fig. 3, since user @noelle shared the situation that happened that day, the speaker



Fig. 3. Millennials using language manipulation

@noelle intended to persuade and distract the reader's focus from reading the *tea* that she found and influence them to spread the *tea*.

Further investigation was carried out to determine whether the millennials feel comfortable employing such terms in their daily conversation. The results show that most millennials are more comfortable using particular communication strategies, such as language manipulation in their daily conversation with their friends (circle) or even with strangers on Twitter to indicate common understanding, common sense, and discourse. Such a condition is related to the theory by Koentjaraningrat [8] that culture is a human possession that grows along with the development of human society. It means that culture is everything concerning human life, especially the interaction and communication used, including the language manipulation used by many millennials on Twitter. However, in the questionnaire, some people disagree with the use of language manipulation because they say it was an extreme event, "*I feel a little uncomfortable because I think it seems strange how a sentence that should have an original meaning can be twisted into another meaning.*" This is also related to Gee's theory that language and culture have similarities because humans are the same [2]. It may affect the perception and thinking patterns of someone. Whether some people agree or disagree with language manipulation, it becomes a cultural essence that will stick until they find another new language trend to indicate their identity.

4 Conclusion

Based on the results and discussion above, it can be concluded that language manipulation is acceptable for millennials on Twitter since almost all millennial Twitter users know and understand the meaning behind the context. Even though some people disagree and think that people who use the language are overreacting, it is still acceptable for them, and it is appropriate around youngsters as long as it is for a good impact. Such language manipulation is used to indicate their circle and discourse. As stated before, culture and language cannot be separated because, like a coin, one side is the language, and the other is culture. When the language is being used for communication, it blends with the culture itself, the language used can influence or affect the culture, and vice versa. Further studies are needed, especially in relation to the creation of such new terms and the transition of such terms into the new trend which might be coined with new terminologies among millennials.

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