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Interpersonal Strategies in the Language of Instagram Users: A Functional Systemic Linguistic Study

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the interpersonal functions in the language used by social media users, especially Instagram. In digital communication, language not only functions as a means of conveying information, but also as a means of building social relations, expressing attitudes, and influencing audiences. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach based on M.A.K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) theory, which focuses on three main elements of interpersonal function: mood, modality, and appraisal. Data were drawn from captions and comments on purposefully selected public Instagram accounts. The results show that Instagram users actively use declarative, interrogative, and imperative sentences to create interpersonal interactions. In addition, the use of modality expressing possibility, necessity, and desire, as well as the expression of attitude and judgment through appraisal strategies were found. The language used tends to be informal, expressive, and creative, reflecting social closeness as well as being a tool in building digital communities. These findings suggest that the interpersonal function of language is instrumental in shaping relationships and engagement between users on social media.

I. INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has brought major changes in various aspects of human life, including the way we communicate (Sakti, 2024). If in the past communication was mostly done directly or through conventional media such as letters and telephones, now social media is the main means of building and maintaining social relationships. One of the most popular social media platforms today is Instagram. According to Sikumbang et al (2024) Instagram is not only used as a place to share photos and videos, but also as an interactive communication space that allows users to convey messages, emotions, and opinions through features such as captions, comments, and stories.

Instagram's popularity is especially prominent among the younger generation who are more active and creative in using language to build self-identity and establish social relations virtually (Shidiqie, 2023). This shows that social media, especially Instagram, has become an important part of contemporary communication dynamics.

In the context of using Instagram, communication is not only focused on visual aspects such as images or videos, but also relies heavily on the use of language, especially in the form of captions, comments, and story features (Annisa & Wulansari, 2024). Through language, users can convey opinions, express feelings, form self-images, and build social relationships with their followers. According to (Apyunita & Asdah)

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the language used on Instagram is generally informal and full of expression, reflecting the closeness and communication style typical of the digital generation. Not infrequently, users also show linguistic creativity through word play, the use of emojis, abbreviations, and code-switching, all of which reflect the dynamics of language in social media. This phenomenon makes Instagram not only a visual platform, but also an interesting study space to see how the social and emotional functions of language are realized in digital interactions (Syariah, 2023).

Seeing the dominant role of language in shaping social relations on Instagram, it is important to understand how language works in the context of interpersonal communication. In the study of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) developed by M.A.K. Halliday (1978), the interpersonal function is one of the three main metafunctions of language that plays a role in building relationships between writers or speakers and readers or listeners. Through this function, language is used to express attitudes, show solidarity or social distance, and influence others (Wiratno, 2014). In the context of social media, the interpersonal function is reflected in word choice, sentence tone, and communication strategies used to attract attention, persuade, or build intimacy. Aspects such as mood (sentence type: statement, question, command), modality (level of belief, necessity, possibility), and appraisal (attitude or assessment towards something) are key in analyzing how social media users convey messages interpersonally. Therefore, the SFL approach is very relevant to understand the language strategies used by Instagram users in building social connections digitally.

By considering the role of language as the main tool in building social relations on social media, the study of interpersonal functions in Instagram language becomes increasingly relevant. The language used by users not only functions as a means of conveying information, but also as a medium to build emotional closeness, assert attitudes towards an issue, and influence audience views or responses. Zis et al (2021) say that in this highly dynamic digital world, the way a person uses language can determine how they are accepted or perceived by the online community. Therefore, analyzing the form and function of language on Instagram can provide a deeper understanding of interpersonal communication practices in the digital era. This study not only enriches the understanding of the phenomenon of language in social media, but also contributes to the development of digital

discourse studies and systemic functional linguistics approaches, especially in the context of interpersonal language use in the realm of virtual communication.

Based on this description, it can be concluded that the study of interpersonal functions in the language used on Instagram is important. The use of language that is full of emotional expressions, judgments, and other interpersonal strategies shows that communication on social media is not only informative, but also relational and affective. Therefore, this study aims to examine how interpersonal functions are realized in the language used by Instagram users. By referring to the functional systemic linguistics approach, especially in the aspects of mood, modality, and appraisal, this study seeks to explore the linguistic strategies used to build social relations, express attitudes, and influence audiences in the context of digital communication.

In line with the formulation of the problem that has been stated, this study aims to analyze the elements of interpersonal functions in the language used by Instagram users, especially through captions and comments. The focus of the analysis is on how language choices in both features reflect attitudes, build social closeness, and influence responses from followers or audiences. Using a functional systemic linguistics approach, this study will identify and interpret the use of aspects such as mood (sentence type), modality (level of belief or necessity), and appraisal (judgment or attitude) in digital communication. The main objective of this study is to provide a deeper understanding of language practices in social media as a complex and dynamic form of interpersonal interaction, and its contribution to the development of language studies in digital contexts.

II. METHODS

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach (Moleong, 2002). With the aim of examining the use of interpersonal functions in the language used by Instagram users. This study is based on the theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) developed by M.A.K. Halliday, especially on the aspects of interpersonal functions which include mood, modality, and appraisal. The data in this study were obtained from captions and comments published on Instagram accounts of public figures or influencers who are active and have a high level of interaction. The data collection technique was carried out through documentation, namely by collecting several captions and comments that were purposively selected based on certain criteria, such as content relevance, number

of interactions, and diversity of language expressions. Furthermore, the data were analyzed using the functional systemic discourse analysis method, by examining language structures that reflect interpersonal functions, both in the form of sentence types (mood), the use of modality, as well as expressions of attitude and appraisal. The main instrument in this study is the researcher himself who acts as a data collector, classifier, and analyzer, with the help of theoretical guidelines and analysis tables to maintain the consistency and validity of the study results.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

One of the main aspects in interpersonal functions according to the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) approach is mood, which relates to the types of sentences speakers use to interact with listeners or readers. On social media platforms such as Instagram, users are very active in utilizing various types of mood, especially in captions and comments, as a means to convey messages and build social relationships. The most dominant form of mood found is the declarative sentence, which is used to convey information, personal stories, daily experiences, or opinions. This type of sentence serves as a way for users to share their lives narratively and establish an emotional connection with followers. For example, in a post, a user could write, "Today I finally finished a big project at work." This kind of sentence is not only informative, but also shows openness and sharing of experiences, which can foster a sense of closeness with the audience.

In addition, there is also the use of interrogative sentences, both in the form of direct and rhetorical questions. Users often ask questions such as "Which outfit do you prefer?" or "Do you agree that the current weather makes you lazy?" These kinds of questions are not solely to seek answers, but rather serve as a strategy to encourage interaction with followers. By including questions in captions, users create opportunities for audiences to respond through comments, which in turn increases engagement and two-way relationships.

Another type of mood that is often used is imperative sentences, especially in the form of invitations, appeals, or promotions. Sentences like "Don't forget to like!", "Check the link in bio now!", or "Let's support the work of the nation's children!" show the user's intention to influence the audience's actions. These imperative sentences are usually found in the context of marketing,

campaigns, or personal promotions, where the user wants to direct the behavior of followers directly.

Overall, the realization of mood in captions and comments on Instagram shows that social media users have consciously or unconsciously utilized a variety of sentence structures to perform interpersonal functions in digital communication. These three types of mood-declarative, interrogative, and imperative-play an important role in creating social interaction, expressing attitudes, and building active engagement with the audience.

In addition to the types of mood used in captions and comments, another aspect of interpersonal function that stands out in Instagram language is modality. In the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework, modality refers to a linguistic expression that reflects a speaker's level of belief, necessity, possibility, or desirability of a statement. The use of modality in social media allows writers to convey attitudes, manage social distance, and build interpersonal relationships in a more subtle and varied manner.

One type of modality that is often found is the modality of possibility, which is characterized by the use of words such as "perhaps", 'likely', or "it seems". This kind of expression shows that the writer is not conveying information absolutely, but rather in a more tentative and personalized tone. For example, in a caption, someone might write, "I think it's going to rain today." This statement not only conveys a weather prediction, but also shows an intimate and reflective style of speech. This choice of modality suggests that the writer is open to other interpretations, while creating an egalitarian relationship with the audience.

In addition, the modality of imperative or suggestion is also frequently used, especially in the context of sharing advice or recommendations. Words like "must", 'should' and "must try" appear when users want to influence their followers' decisions or actions. For example, in the promotion of a product or place, a user may write "You should try the coffee at this place, it's really good!" This sentence asserts the author's personal opinion while aiming to convince the audience to follow the recommendation. This type of modality indicates a more active interpersonal position and strong persuasion.

On the other hand, modalities that express will or desire, such as "pengen", 'ingin', or "hopefully", signify a deeper emotional engagement. Phrases like "Pengen vacation again to Bali" or "Hopefully everything will go smoothly" not only show personal hope, but also create an emotional connection between the writer and the reader. The

use of these modalities shows the human and empathic side of the speaker, which is important in building social relationships in the digital world.

Thus, the use of modality in Instagram captions and comments enriches the interpersonal function of the language used. Through the expression of possibilities, suggestions, and wishes, speakers can convey their attitudes in a more nuanced and interactive way, strengthen relationships with the audience, and show a distinctive personal identity in the social media communication space.

Besides the use of mood and modality, another important aspect of interpersonal function that appears predominantly in Instagram language is appraisal. In Systemic Functional Linguistics theory, appraisal is an evaluative system that reflects speakers' attitudes, judgments, and emotions towards an event, object, or individual. Through the appraisal system, users not only convey information, but also show how they feel and judge things, so that interactions become more personalized, expressive, and emotionally charged.

In many captions and comments, Instagram users explicitly show affective attitudes, which are personal feelings related to happiness, pride, sadness, and disappointment. For example, statements such as "Finally on vacation too, so happy!" or "Disappointed that all plans are canceled today" contain strong expressions of emotion and serve as a means to invite the audience to feel the same way. Such expressions strengthen emotional engagement in communication and encourage empathy or response from the reader.

Not only feelings, users also express many judgments about people or objects, which are also referred to as judgment and appreciation in the appraisal framework. Examples are comments such as "He is really nice and not arrogant" or "This place is really aesthetic and cozy". Such judgments are not merely descriptive, but carry social and aesthetic values that affirm the interpersonal position of the speaker. By giving an assessment, the user indirectly builds self-identity as someone who is sensitive, wise, or has certain tastes, while influencing the audience's views.

In addition, graduation or reinforcement of evaluation is an integral element of appraisal practices on social media. Words such as "really", "super", 'severe', and "really" are often used to reinforce the intensity of the assessment or emotion to be conveyed. For example, in the

statement "This food is really good, super recommended!", there is a clear intensification of flavor and persuasion. This form shows that the user is not only judging, but also emphasizing the importance of the emotion or value they are conveying, thus creating a stronger impression in the minds of the audience.

Overall, the use of appraisal in Instagram captions and comments shows that digital language is not neutral, but full of values, feelings and attitudes. Through this appraisal system, users build rich interpersonal relationships, convey emotions openly, and create more meaningful and socially impactful communication in a dynamic digital space.

Another aspect that reinforces the realization of interpersonal functions in the Instagram language is the creativity and language style used by its users. In the realm of social media, especially Instagram, language styles tend to be very informal, casual, and expressive, reflecting the social closeness between users. The choice of non-standard diction, the use of short and spontaneous sentences, and flexible language structures are the main characteristics that support the creation of an intimate, equal, and distance-free impression between the writer and the reader. This kind of language style indirectly strengthens the interpersonal dimension because it provides space for more authentic and emotional self-expression.

One of the most prominent forms of creativity is the use of emojis, which serve to complement verbal meaning and amplify expressions of emotion. For example, the laughing 😂, heart ❤️, or fire 🔥 emoji are often used to convey feelings without the need to explain at length. Emojis not only clarify emotional nuances, but also become a visual tool that brings communication between users closer. In addition, abbreviations such as "LOL", "OOTD", or 'BTW', as well as code-switching between Bahasa Indonesia and English such as "I'm so happy today!" are part of a modern communication style and reflect the identity of users who are familiar with global digital culture.

More than just a casual style, language strategies on Instagram also play a role in building personal branding. Certain users intentionally create a distinctive language style, whether through word choice, conversational tone, or the way they address followers, to show their uniqueness and differentiate themselves from others. For example, a beauty influencer might use language that is full of praise and encouragement, while a humor account prefers a quirky and funny style. This style of language not only conveys information or emotion, but also becomes part of their digital

identity and a tool to establish and maintain a relationship with their audience.

Thus, the creativity and language styles that appear in Instagram captions and comments show that interpersonal functions are not only realized through grammatical structures such as mood or modality, but also through language choices that are full of innovation and communication strategies. Informal, emotive and interactive language styles are the main characteristics of interpersonal communication on social media, while reflecting the social dynamics that occur in a fluid and rapidly changing digital space.

In the end, all elements of interpersonal functions found in Instagram captions and comments, from the use of mood, modality, appraisal, to the creativity of language styles, contribute greatly to the formation and strengthening of digital communities. In this context, captions and comments not only function as a medium to convey messages or information, but also as a tool to build emotional closeness between users and their followers. Expressive word choices, appropriate use of emojis, and the delivery of personal opinions or experiences create a warm and personalized sense of communication. This is very effective in creating a sense of connectedness among members of the social media community.

The interpersonal function of language also allows for two-way interaction between account owners and their followers. When users ask questions in captions, make suggestions, or respond to followers' comments with friendly language, the communication process is no longer one-way, but becomes a participatory dialog. This is what distinguishes social media from traditional media: audiences have the space to talk back, and language becomes the main bridge in building these interactions.

Furthermore, this interpersonal language practice also plays a role in fostering audience loyalty and engagement. When followers feel valued, heard, or emotionally recognized through the language used, the digital connection is stronger. They tend to revisit the account, comment, share the content, and even recommend it to others. This means that interpersonal language is one of the important foundations in forming an active, loyal and supportive online community. Thus, it can be concluded that interpersonal functions not only have a linguistic role in language structure, but also a social role in building and maintaining digital communities. Amidst the growing culture of social media interaction, the ability to use language

interpersonally is an important skill in creating authentic, warm and meaningful relationships between users and their audiences.

IV. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Based on the analysis of Instagram captions and user comments, it can be concluded that the language used on social media not only functions as a means of conveying information, but also as a powerful tool in building social and emotional relationships with audiences. Through the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) approach, especially in the aspect of interpersonal function, it is found that users actively utilize various forms of mood (declarative, interrogative, imperative), modality (possibility, necessity, desire), and appraisal (attitude, judgment, emotion) to convey feelings, attitudes, and build meaningful interactions.

In addition to the linguistic structure, the informal, creative language style, as well as the use of emojis, abbreviations, and mixed language also reinforce the intimate and expressive interpersonal feel. All these elements contribute to creating a warmer and more personalized two-way communication between users and their followers. Furthermore, the interpersonal function of language also plays an important role in forming an active, loyal and emotionally connected digital community.

Thus, this study shows that language on social media, especially Instagram, is a complex and interpersonal form of communication. The use of appropriate linguistic strategies enables the creation of close social relationships in the digital space, making social media not only a place to share visual content, but also a place for strong and dynamic social interaction.

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