

## CHAPTER 2

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, several theories are used to support as the theoretical background in conducting the research. There are three main theories and sub theories which are included in this chapter. The first is the theory of Backchannel. The second is the theory of Gender Issues. Then, the third is the theory of Text Message. In addition, there are some theories which are also related to the main theories, such as definition of pragmatics, types of backchannel, use of backchannel, and the importance of backchannel, Backchannel and gender issue, and last backchannel in text message.

#### 2.1. Pragmatics

Pragmatics is a study of relationship between sentence and linguistic meaning in the context and situation which they are used (Fromkin, Rodman & Hyams 2003:207). On the other hand, Yule (1995: 3) stated:

Pragmatics is the study of speaker meaning, contextual meaning, how more get communicated than is said, and the study of the expression of relative distance. The use of studying pragmatics is to understand and to be able to talk about people's intended meanings, people's assumption, people's purposes or goals, and the kinds of action that they are performing when they speak. Yule (1998: 3)

Based on Yule's (1998) book *Pragmatics*, the writer choose the sub chapter of conversation and preferences structures. It is the chapter where we learn to analyze conversations and it structures with backchannel, pauses, overlaps, conversation style, adjacency pairs and it preference structure theories. Clearly then, the backchannel theory is further analyze for this research.

### 2.1.1. Backchannel

There are several signals to indicate if someone is listening to the speaker. This signal is called backchannel (Grundy, 2000, p. 189). Here, backchannel present the understanding of the recipients in conversation. Clayman (2002) says that the understanding can be identified by verbal backchannel or non verbal backchannel. The verbal backchannel are in a form of words such as yeah, right, or yes. On the other hand, the non verbal backchannel are more likely to be hearable aspiration such as *mm hmm*, or *uh huh*. By doing backchannel, the current speaker gives their opportunities to speak so as to permit the current speaker to continue. It also shows a commitment to hear what the other has to say. (pp. 108, 112).

Therefore, backchannel is a word or phrase that provides feedback to the dominant speaker, indicating that the non dominant speaker is still engaged in the conversation. Backchannel skills are important for people wishing to be able to function as supportive, cooperative listeners. They are also of scientific interest, as they are the most accessible example of the real time responsiveness that underpins many successful interpersonal interactions. The use of backchannel itself are very common in Japanese, English, Dutch, Arabic, and Korean, less common in German, and significantly less common in Chinese and Finnish. However this is also affected strongly by other factors, including the personalities of the speaker and listener, the context and the culture.

Backchannel implies attention, agreement, and various emotional reactions and responses such as m, mhm, yes, yeah, right, fine, OK, alright, I see. Provides the speaker with the information that his message has been received, understood, agreed to or has caused a certain effect thereby supplying him with direct feedback. The information is normally not commented on by the speaker, they just preserve the flow of conversation. If the speaker would not be given such a feedback and only silence would be present, he would start to think that no attention to what he utters is paid and the flow of conversation would be disrupted. Backchannel mainly do not bring any new content based information to communication, but are mainly important for the relationship between the speaker and the listener because backchannel reflect the listener's intention to listen.

### 2.1.2. Types of Backchannel

Backchannel has been classified into many types by some researchers. For that reason, it is possible to find a wide range of backchannel varieties from several researchers whom engaged in backchannel.

According to Iwasaki (1997) in Lambertz, K (2011) it is commonly known that backchannel has three categories. The following numbers are the types of backchannel with its explanation.

#### 1. *Non-Lexical Backchannel*

Non-Lexical Backchannel is a typical vocalic sound that has little or no refers entail meaning. However, the speaker and backchannel-er share the same understanding of the convention that the response serve to indicate the listener's attention. For example, "*Uh-huh*" or "*Mmm*".

#### 2. *Phrasal Backchannel*

Phrasal backchannel is a typical expression of acknowledgment and assessment, such as *really*. For example, "*Really?*" "*You don't say*" or "*Yes,yes!*".

#### 3. *Substantive Backchannel*

Substantive backchannels, turns with referential content such as a repetition or a clarifying question. They are usually requests for clarification or repetitions, but are not substantial enough to include new thoughts or ideas. If these are introduced the listener becomes the main speaker, and roles are reversed. For example, "*but ah*" or "*you know*".

By contrast, Tottie in Pipek (2007), decided to categorize backchannel into three classifications. First, 'simple', as it's called this type consist of simple or single words of backchannel item, for example *mhm*, *ya*, *ha?*, *and etc*. Second, 'double' represent multiple repetitions of the same backchannel item, such as *yeah yeah*, *yayaya*, *haha* or *hmm hmm*. The third one is 'complex', it consist of one or several items from different backchannel categories and/or one or several open-class lexical items as in *yes*, *quite*, or *yes I know*.

In general, there are some types of backchannel which has been established by some researchers. Nevertheless, the writer only focuses on the types of simple, double, and complex backchannel by Iwasaki (1997) in Lambertz, K (2011) The participants in this research use written language in backchannel studies on Text message, which are suitable to be analyzed in this study.

### 2.1.3. Functions of Backchannel

While there clearly occur some variations in how researches choose to identify their categories regarding the functions of backchannel, Maynard (1997) classifies some functions and its explanation in the example below.

#### 1. *Continuers*

Maynard (1997) stated that the main functions of this type of backchannel are for the non-primary speaker to signal to the primary speaker that they are indeed listening, attentively, and to allow the primary speaker to continue their speaking turn.

#### **Example 1**

A: I'll pick it up from his place

B: *Mm hm*

A: at around 7 o'clock

In this example, it can be seen B's backchannel of *Mm hm* signals that B is listening and A should continue speaking.

#### 2. *Display of content understanding*

The ethnic identity is one of the factors of using backchannel. This function is used when the non-primary speaker feels it is necessary to show that he/she understands the primary speaker. Here is an example.

#### **Example 2**

A: You have to go two blocks

B: *Mm hm*

A: then turn left at the video store

B: *Uh huh*

A: its a few stores down on the right side

B: *I see*

A: You can't miss it

In this example, B sends two continuer type backchannels in *Mm hm* and *Uh huh* to signal to A that he/she should continue giving directions, and once B seems to understand where the place is, B signals understanding of content to A with the backchannel *I see*.

### 3. *Agreement*

This is when the non-primary speaker reacts to a question or question like utterance made by the primary speaker. This can be seen below:

#### **Example 3**

A: You mean you heard the news already.

B: (*Head Nod*)

C: I was going to tell you.

This example shows B reacting with the backchannel *Head Nod* in agreement to A's question like statement. In examples such this, it may be difficult to distinguish between the agreement and understanding categories (Kobayashi 1995).

### 4. *Support and empathy toward the speaker's judgment*

This occurs when the non-primary speaker responds with a show of support or empathy to an evaluative statement made by the primary speaker. The example of this function is explained below.

#### **Example 4**

A: He quit his job again

B: It's going to be hard to find a new one

A: *Yeah*

B: He'll have to apply...

This could be interpreted as A feels it necessary to provide support to B's evaluative statement *It's going to be hard to find a new one*, hence A uttered the backchannel *Yeah*.

### 5. *Strong emotional response*

This is when the non-primary speaker responds emphatically to a statement made by the primary speaker, which indicate more than simple

continuer, understanding, or support. Such backchannels are found in the forms of laughs and exclamatory statements as in the following example.

**Example 5**

A. I got an A+ on my Chemistry test.

B. *Fantastic!*

A. I hope I can keep it up all semester.

6. *Minor Addition, Correction or Request for Information*

This occurs in such instances as when the non-primary speaker corrects something the primary speaker has just uttered, when the non-primary speaker needs clarification or when the non-primary speaker attempts to add a word in completing the utterance the primary speaker has just made.

**Example 6**

A: John will likely be back in April.

B: *Really.*

A. Yeah, the government is reducing troops in the gulf.

In this example, it is clear to see that B is surprised at A's first utterance, and B's backchannel responses of *Really* signaled Bs request for confirmation.

In addition to function derived from Maynard (1997), there are other functions of backchannel by McMullan (2006) as cited in Pipek (2007). Based on the information provided to the current speaker, backchannel can be recognized through 4 functions.

1. Backchannel as a 'continuer'

In agreement with Hayashi and Hayashi (1991, in White 1997), this kind is the most common from backchannels. The main function is to maintain the flow of conversation and the desire of the current speaker to continue his turn. It also serves as a floor-yielding device and it provides feedback that the attention is paid to what is being uttered. Continuer does not express any particular listener's attitude to what is said and only endorse the current speaker to continue his turn.

**Example 7**

- A. when my mom hangs up the phone I was like  
 B. mhm  
 A. what's with her? It's not that I don't pick up her phone or  
 B. mhm  
 A. you know I was with my boss right

## 2. Backchannel as a 'captured interest token'

It means that the current listener communicates that the information uttered by the current speaker is of great interest, or importance in relation to the listeners. They express that the listener pays attention to what is said, as well as the continuers, the difference being in the relation to the uttered information. They may have the evaluative characteristic.

**Example 8**

- A. Do you remember the purse I told you were on big sale?  
 B. yeah, I do  
 A. I just bought it yesterday, with the same exact color I show you  
 B. hmmm GREAT  
 A. This must be my luck

The use of *hmmm* great signals the listener's high interest in what has been uttered. The listener only reflects his interest in the current topic and thus encourages the current speaker to continue his turn.

## 3. Backchannel as a 'consonance token'

Consonance token inform the speaker that the listener agrees with the standpoint of the speaker or that the listener is in convergence with the conveyed idea, as it indicates in the example below, where B shows an agreement with the conveyed idea by A.

**Example 9**

- A. I mean if he meant what he's saying, he should have been here by the time, right?  
 B. of course  
 A. Well let's see what will happen

## 4. Backchannel as an 'information confirmation token'

This function of backchannel expresses that the stated information has been received and in addition the agreement or disagreement with the

information conveyed. It is also to state whether the listener accepts or denies the information, and that the listener still supports the current speaker in his turn. This category of backchannel is the most likely to be mistaken for a turn and vice versa, and often is very disputable on the view of the researcher.

**Example 10**

A. you're making fun of me aren't you?

B. no

A. or you dare prank me I'll punch in the face lol

To help make sense out of all the terms explained above, the writer agrees with Fujimoto T. D (2007) to compile a list of all the possible functions of the generic listener response into 13 functions, which are more lightly inferred.

1. Continuer (keeps the floor open for the current speaker to continue speaking)
2. Acknowledgment (shows one has heard the current speaker)
3. Newsmaker (marks what the speaker has said as newsworthy in some way)
4. Change of activity (marks the transition for a new activity or topic)
5. Assessment (evaluates the talk of the current speaker)
6. Claim understanding (shows one has comprehended the speaker)
7. Agreement (shows support of what the speaker has said)
8. Disagreement (shows non-support of what the speaker has said)
9. Clarification (checks to make sure s/he has heard correctly)
10. Signal of confirmation (shows one has received specific information)
11. Interest or attentive signal (displays interest and engagement in what the speaker has said)
12. Collaborative finish (the listener finishes the speaker's utterance)
13. Emotional response (expresses an emotional reaction to the speaker)

This is not meant to be a comprehensive list of possible functions. They are listed here to illustrate the variety of uses used by researchers. With the sheer number of functions, it is quite possible that any term which tries to encompass all of them



will only serve to complicate the differences between the differences which actually it could be crucial to understanding an interaction.

However, there are still many other functions of backchannel which have been identified by another researcher in their study of backchannel. Based on the researcher data observation, the functions of backchannel mostly the same in meaning but are different in its name. Therefore, further research about the analysis of the type and function of backchannel will be conducted in the next chapter.

#### **2.1.4. The Importance of Backchannel**

Backchannel (Yngve 1970) or generally known as the ‘Listener response’ has an important role in a conversation. Defended by Zimmermann (1991) who claims that the quality of a conversation depends widely on what takes place in the person to whom words are directed. Zimmermann (1991) added that in order to act as an active, supportive, and polite listener, one should in general signal an interest in what the speaker is saying. Which made back-channels has its special role in a conversation, because each back-channels word has its meaning place in a conversation.

However, Svennevig (1999) insists both speaker and listener are backchannel-er by being polite showing attentiveness in orientation to each other and using self-oriented comments to show that they cope to the conversation.

## **2.2. Gender Issue**

There are many evidences that show men and women speak in different way. It can be seen from the topic they select in conversation, absolutely men and women focus on different concern. In conversation, women are more interested in something personal. Wareing (2004) stated that women tend to use their feeling, such as talking about family and talking about friendship, while men like discussing impersonal topics, based on general information or their hobbies, such as automotive, photography, soccer, etc. Wareing (2004) added that men prefer to share the experiences and switch the information as the motive for the discussion. Meanwhile, women tend to build and keep up the good relationship by listening to the speaker carefully and giving back channel support. (Wareing, 2004, p. 89).

Tannen (1991) also claimed that "men and women come from different cultures in the sense that they grow up to have completely different ideas, different expectations, their place in the world, and about what the conversation are for" (Goddard and Patterson, 2000, p. 101). In other words, what women and men produced are totally not similar. Because of different main set since they were born, it makes the way they think, their potential, their reason of the conversation are dissimilar.

### **2.2.1. Backchannel and Gender Issue**

According to Jenkins and Cheshire (1990) in a conversation, men are less active than women do in supportive roles. In other word, women give more backchannel support than men do in a chat. Backchannel is the way that listeners provide to the speaker through feedback. There are two types of feedback women use; it could be verbal and non-verbal. So, women usually respond with mmm, huh, yeah, by nodding, smiling, frowning including gestures and body language (Wareing, 2004, p. 88).

There are statements come from some researcher such as Cameron, Coates, and Tanen (1991) who said that in discussion between men and women, so often women talk more and have many questions to answer by men, then men will frequently answer their question and takes time, while when men explaining, women takes more 'backchannel noise' by saying uh-huh, yeah, yess, hmmm (Stockwell, 2007, p. 21).

In addition, a previous study of backchannel by men and women has found that women used backchannel more frequently than men (e.g., Fishman, 1983; Hirschman, 1994; Roger & Schumacher, 1983; Roger & Nesshoever, 1987; Roger, 1989; Zimmerman & West, 1975; Fellegly 1995). Roger (1987) and Schumacher (1983) found that female listeners provided significantly more verbal backchannel than did male listeners in three conditions.

Some researchers pointed out that contexts where backchannels occur might be different between men and women. For example, Zimmerman and West (1975) found that men use more delayed backchannels which are preceded by at least one second of silence and occurred infrequently in mixed-sex conversation, compared to single-sex conversation. The delayed backchannels are those which were inserted

beyond the end of the utterance in talk with women. Furthermore, these backchannels are preceded by pauses and most of them were followed by perceptible silences for the following speaker. Besides, these delayed backchannels are less likely to occur in the single-sex conversations, compared to the mixed-sex conversations. They argued that delayed backchannels by men might be indicators of a lack of understanding or disinterest in and inattention to the current talk (Zimmerman & West, 1975, p.123). They also argued that men used such backchannels to restrict women in developing the topic of conversation and so they then can control the topic of conversation on their own (Zimmerman & West, 1975, p.124). (Kogure. M 2003: 53)

Fishman (1983 in Kogure. M 2003) also reported a similar finding as in Zimmerman & West (1975). She found that men tend to produce backchannel at the end of a long utterance by a female speaker, whereas women tend to frequently produce backchannel not only at the end but also in the middle of utterances. Fishman (1983, p.96) argued that the frequent use of backchannel by women are indications of their attention to the speaker participation in the conversation, and interest in the interaction and the speaker. These backchannel is inserted to support the speaker. On the other hand, according to Fishman (1983, p.95), use of backchannel at the end of an utterance by men displayed a lack of interest. Thus, contrasting to women's use of backchannel, these are inserted to discourage interaction.

Mulac et al. (1998) used the interpretations of the observers of conversations to try to find out which is the more possible theory for the explanation of gender differences in the use of backchannel. The two approaches were the cultural approach in which it is claimed that men and women grow up in different subcultures, which caused different communication styles between men and women (e.g., Maltz & Borker, 1982), and the dominance approach in which it is claimed that gender differences in language use occur because of imbalance of power in society between men and women; men is more powerful than women (e.g., Lakoff, 1974,1975). (Kogure. M 2003: 54)

Mulac et al. had 268 student observers assessed backchannel and questions in terms of the meaning they associated with the utterance and the traits exemplified by the speaker of the utterance, according to rating scales. They found that men and women differed in the interpretation of backchannel; male observers interpreted

backchannel as more controlling such as giving information, stating an opinion, and leading the conversation while females considered backchannel to have a different function such as showing interest or agreement, and seeking clarification. In addition, male observers judged backchannel as an indication of uncertainty more than female counterparts. Furthermore, Mulac et al. found that both male and female observers perceived backchannel as more controlling when the backchannel were produced to a female partner than when they were produced to a male partner. Besides, both male and female observers considered the speaker more dominant when the partner was female than when the partner was male. In both cases, no significant relationship was found between the speaker's gender and their perceptions. According to Mulac et al., these results supported the claim of the culture approach as outlined above.

### **2.3. Text Message**

According to Dansieh (2011) Text messaging is the practice where users of mobile devices exchange brief written messages via cellular networks. While the act of sending a text message is termed “texting”, the sender is called a “texter”

It is used in place of voice calls in circumstances where it may be impossible or inexpedient. Generally, texting is considered more efficient. Some people simply text because it is relatively cheaper compared to placing a phone call to another mobile phone. Originally, it referred to messages sent using the Short Message Service (SMS); but as is characteristic of most technologies, the service has undergone transformations to cover messages that contain image, video, and sound. It has also evolved from person-to-person messaging to include interaction with automated systems and is available on a wide range of networks.

#### **2.3.1. Functions of Text Message**

In agreement with Grinter and Eldridge (2001, in Goumi, A., Volckaert-Legrier, O., Bert-Erboul, A. & Bernicot, J. 2011), the writer categorize text message into four functions:

- a. arranging times to chat on the computer

- b. co-ordinating activities with friends
- c. chatting and gossiping
- d. co-ordinating activities with family

In addition, Ling (2005, in Goumi, A., Volckaert-Legrier, O., Bert-Erboul, A. & Bernicot, J. 2011), also studied the functions of text message. The functions are categorized into seven:

- a. Dealt with making arrangements for daily activities (i.e., “Could you pick up the children from day care?”).
- b. This was followed, in decreasing order, by grooming-related messages (i.e., “Good night sex bomb”)
- c. Simple responses (i.e., “yes” or “no”)
- d. Questions
- e. Information
- f. Instructions and requests
- g. and Personal news

Last, according to Deumert and Masinyana (2008, in Goumi, A., Volckaert-Legrier, O., Bert-Erboul, A. & Bernicot, J. 2011), in the same study as mentioned above, also examined the different functions of text messages. To conclude with the previous category functions, almost half of the messages sent had to do with friendly relations, love related messages, informational messages, practical and social organization, and chain letters.

### **2.3.2. Backchannel and Text Message**

According to Hemmer, H (2009), these are the effects of Text messaging based on genders:

#### *a. Multitasking*

All of the females agree text messaging is used for multi-tasking. Most of females even admit to using text messaging at work when the boss is not around. The females’ text message in class, because they are bored. I

asked them if they thought text messaging was a distraction. The females focus group concurred text messaging is a distraction, but that is why they use text messages in class or at work. The female focus groups want to be distracted, because they were bored. One of the participants says she uses text messaging, while she is engaging in a face-to-face conversation. She knows texting while communicating face-to-face is rude. But if she is uninterested in the face-to-face conversation, she will let the other person know the conversation is pointless by bringing out her phone and texting.

The males agree with the females that text messaging is used for multi-tasking. They also use text messaging at work and school. In addition, the male focus group uses text messages during a TV program. The male group finds text messaging entertaining. One male said he felt text messaging is good for multitasking, but you are limited in that you only get 160 characters for one message.

*b. Addiction*

All but one female think text messaging could be an addiction. One of the participants admits she is addicted. She feels she needs to text every day to communicate. Another participant stated she would never get addicted, due to the cost. The one who claims she could be addicted has unlimited text messaging. The other one who claims she will never get addicted does not have unlimited texting. The female focus group also concurred they find themselves saying “Throw me a text” instead of saying “Give me a call”. However, all but one of the males does not believe text messaging could be an addiction.

The other four males disagree. The males say “addiction” is too strong of a word. When the males think of addiction, they think of heroin. One of the males mentioned text messages could be habit forming, but not an addiction.

*c. Connection*

The females find text messaging is used for a connection. One of the participants says her best friend moved away. And now her inbox is full of text messages such as “I saw a guy with a beard. You would like him” or “It

is rainy here in Washington”. The text messages are humorous, but the main purpose the text message is used for is intimacy and connection. Even though friends, family, or lovers are far away in distance, text messaging is perfect for reminding them they still care.

The males also text people to have a connection. The males will text things like “I am thinking of you” or just text friendly like “How are you?” One of the males knows Spanish and he texts his mom in Spanish. He considers himself a bilingual texter. Sometimes the males’ text messages they would be too embarrassed to say. Text messages are just easier. However, one of the participants receives a text message from a girl asking how he felt about her. He ignored the text, because it was annoying. He concludes there are certain messages you can text, and there are messages you do not text.

*d. Displacement*

None of the females feel like text messaging is displacing face-to-face communication. One of the females says the phone has already displaced face-to-face communication. The females say text messaging is written communication and therefore cannot displace a verbal communication. The female focus group did admit to avoiding communication sometimes with text messages, but the text messages did not displace their face-to-face communication. Four of the males thought text messages did not displace face-to-face communication. However, one male did, which is different from the females in which all of them disagreed.

The male thought text messages displaced face-to-face communication, because you can now text messages instead of delivering the messages verbally. He gave an example of himself and his roommates. He has the gas bill in his name. Whenever he gets the bill, he texts his four roommates the amount they owe him, instead of going up to their room and knocking on their door. Therefore, he claims text messaging displaces face-to-face communication. The other four believe text messaging does not prevent them from having face-to-face communication conversations. However, the males did admit to avoiding face-to-face communication sometimes when they text. But the text messages do not displace their face-to-face communication.

e. *Trendiness*

The females do not find text messaging trendy. One of the participants said she thought it was just technology. Everybody has text messaging, even some of the participant's parents.

In contrast, all of the males agreed text messaging is trendy. The males agree text messages determine a class or a generation. You can just whip out your phone and look trendy by using text messages, because older people do not. Plus, now there are even picture texts instead of all words.

## 2.4. Previous Research

Previous research that is related to the topic are from Masaryk University, Czech Republic, *On Backchannel in English Conversation* By Vojtěch Pipek (2007) and *Back-channeling: The use of yeah and mm to portray engaged listenership* By Kathrin Lambertz (2011). Both research studied about pragmatic studies, conversation analysis focusing on Backchannel.

The first previous research is from Masark University Czech Republic, title *On Backchannel in English Conversation* By Vojtěch Pipek in 2007. The aim of this research was analysing and specifying the most frequently used items serving as backchannels, the relation between the gender of the listener and backchannel signals used, and main features of backchannels, such as the most characteristic discourse functions, intonation and overlapping tendency. The study analysis is based on five conversational texts taken from A Corpus of English Conversation (1980), which provides transcribed spoken discourse of native English speakers.

Pipek chose five conversational texts to analyse them from several different viewpoints, which were: 1. the gender of the speakers. 2. the backchannel-category membership 3. The discourse function and 4. the occurrence of backchannels overlapping with the current speaker's utterance. The analysis was enabled by their in-depth quantitative and qualitative analysis. First, Pipek turned to the individual texts analysed, namely S.1.1, S.1.4, S.1.5, S.1.6, S.1.8, then described all the features, aspects and peculiarities of backchannels analyzed. Second, the results of the analysis based on the five texts are compared with regard to all the mentioned features of backchannels.



The overall results shows that the choice of backchannel devices is an issue of a highly individual character, in other words, person specific, and that it is important where the communication takes place, namely that is also context-sensitive.

The second previous research, titled *Back-channeling: The use of yeah and mm to portray engaged listenership* By Kathrin Lambertz (2011) was aimed to investigate the uses of yeah and mm as backchannelling utterances to show engaged listenership. The research focused on the different backchannel functions that can be identified and the locations at which they occur. Data were analyzed from the Griffith Corpus of Spoken Australian English (GCSAusE) and some data collected. The method of data collection were consisted of conversations between two female friends supported through examples collected from the GCSAusE. The findings of this research have resulted to the importance of the listener in a conversation. Backchannel utterances are important, as they are one of the few indicators that shed some light on one of the central features in a conversation, which is the listener.

From these researches the writer inspired to make a research using the pragmatics study, conversation and preference structure focusing on Backchannel study.

