A STUDY OF MEANING IN LANGUAGE USE:
LACK OF ARGUMENT IN FALLACIES

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Abstrak

Pemakaian atau penggunaan bahasa dalam suatu kegiatan komunikasi, baik dalam bentuk lisan maupun tulisan, seringkali mengaburkan makna sejati dari informasi yang disampaikan. Dalam menyampaikan suatu pesan atau informasi sesorang seringkali mengedepankan generalisasi makna yang kadang tidak didukung oleh argumen-argumen yang logis. Bahasa politik dan iklan misalnya, syarat dngan gaya dan sikap berbahasa yang menjeneralisir fakta dengan argumen-argumen atau buah pikiran yang keliru (dalam bahasa Inggris disebut *fallacies)*. Makalah ini mencoba mengkaji secara sederhana tentang pemakaian bahasa dalam rangka menyampaikan informasi yang mengandung makna general (bersifat umum) tetapi sejatinya memuat buah pikiran yang keliru.

INTRODUCTION

A meaningful sentence must have two dimension: the force and content[1] Every single sentence is considered to have communicative potensial when it is supported by empirical facts and adequate arguments. A meaningful sentence is not just a statement or only represents general reasoning without sufficient argument. We sometime have lack of argument in conveying our messages to other people resulted from fallacies.

Argument is defined as a set of statements in which a claim is made, support is offered for it and an attempt to influence someone in a content of disagreement[2]. Moreover, Warnick and Inch added that fallacies are argument flawed by irreleveant or inadequate evidence, erroneous reasoning, or improper expression[3]. Furthermore, they classified

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[1] Akmajian, Adrian et al. 1995. *Linguistics: An Introduction to Language and Communication.* Hong Kong: Asco Trade Typesetting Ltd. 238.

[2] Warnick, Barbara and Edward S. Inch. 1994. *Critical Thinking and Communication: The Use of Reason in Argument*. New York: MacMillan Publishing Company. hal. 6

[3] *Ibid.*, hal. 139-156

fallacies into fallacies of faulty reasoning, fallacies of grounding, , and fallacies of language use. Following are the discussion of these classification of fallacies.

1. Fallacies of Faulty Reasoning

Warnick and Inch[4] stated that fallacies of faulty reasoning are caused by erroneous inferences made by the writer in drawing the claim. There are four types of faulty reasoning fallacies that commonly occur in arguments. They are false analogy, hasty generalization, false cause, and slippery slope.

a. *False Analogy*

Analogy is comparing two objects of the same class that share many characteristics and concludes that a known characteristics that one object possesses is also shared by the other[5]. A false analogy compares two things that are not alike in significant respects or have critical points of difference. A writer or a speaker who uses analogy will overlook the possibility that the two objects he is comparing maybe unlike each other in significant ways that affect the probability of his conclusion. Although analogy can be used to explain, it cannot be used to argue[6]. In other words, it is added that since no analogy is able to present a perfect likeness between two different objects, it cannot be used to prove that such a perfect likeness exists. Below is an example of a false analogy used in an argument:

Keberhasilan program lina hari kerja dalam seminggu di perusahaan-perusahaan Amerika yang berdampak pada efisiensi dan produktivitas kerja memberi kesan bahwa program yang sama dapat diterapkan di sini.

The analogy used in the above example is considered to be faulty because the cultural values and economic property ratings in the United States are different from Indonesia; therefore their comparison is not alike in significant respects including the workweek system adopted by the Indonesian government.

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[4] *Ibid.*, hal. 140
[5] Ibid., hal. 115
[6] Hefferman, James A.W. and John E. Lincoln. 1986. *Writing: A College Handbook*. New York: Norton and Company. hal. 128

b. *Hasty generalization*

According to Warnick and Inch, generalization is an argument which reason that what is true of certain members of a class will also be true of the same members of the same class or of the class a whole. [7] Generalization often extrapolates characteristics from some to all members of a class or may atribute the characteristics of a class to its individual members. Hasty generalization can be defined as the fallacy of generalizing about a population based on a sample which is too small to be representative. If the population is heterogenous, then the sample needs to be large enough to represent the population's variability. With a completely homogeneous population, a sample of one is sufficiently large, so it is imposibble to put an absolute lower limit on sample size. Rather, sample size depends directly upon the variability of the population. Ii is to say, the more heterogeneous a population is, the larger the sample is required. For example, people tend to be quite variable in their political opnions, so that public opinion polls need fairly large samples to be accurate. A hasty generalization draws a conclusion about a class based on too few or a typical example. Below is the example of a hasty generalization:

"Saya sudah dengar bahwa mobil CAMRY merupakan mobil pribadi yang terkenal dengan reputasi tingkat keselamatan yang tinggi. Namun demikian, baru-baru ini tetangga saya terbaring di rumah sakit dengan luka yang cukup serius akibat kecelakan ketika mengendarai mobil CAMRY-nya. Saya tidak akan membeli mobil merek tersebut.

The claim in the example above is considered to be fallacious because the speaker is allowing the vividness in his mind of his neighbor's recent misfortune in an accident.

c. *False Cause*

Fallacies can be also be caused by erroneous causal reasoning. Commonly, there are two common causal reasoning fallacies: a fallacy which misidentifies a

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[7] Warnick and Inch, Op. Cit. hal. 118

cause and a fallacy that misidentifies a single cause failing to go far enough in accounting for posible causes.. In view of logical semantics, a cause reasomning fallacy can mean "after this therefore because of this" or in other words, "If X happened after Y, it musth have happened because Y". There is a mistaken conclusion because the word "after" does not necessarily mean "because of". This kind of fallacy might be caused by the assumption that because two events are associated in time, one event must have caused by the other. According to Hefferman and Lincoln[8], this sort of argument is often used in political campaign. Below is the example of this false cause fallacy:

"The only policy that effectively reduces public shootings is right to carry laws. Allowing citizens to carry concealed handguns reduces violent crime. In the 31 states that have passed right to carry laws since the mid 1980s, the number of multiple victim public shootings and other violent crimes, has dropped dramatically. Murders fell by 7.65%, rapes by 5.2%, aggravated assault by 7%, and robberies by 3%.[9]

The second causation fallacy is a single cause. Single cause fallacies occur when one cause is proposed to be the only cause for a complex problem. This is misleading because it does not account for other, possibly important variables worth considering. Below is the example of a single cause fallacy:

Hutang luar negeri merupakan penyebab terjadinya krisis keuangan di Indonesia.

In the above example, only one cause is stated while the monetary crisis itself might be caused by global market competetion, fluctuation of various currencies, corruption, etc.

d. *Slippery Slope*

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[8] Hefferman and Lincoln, Op. Cit. hal 129)
[9] The Media Campaign Against Gun Ownership, The Phylis Schafly Report, Vol. 3. No. 11, June 2000)

The slippery slope argument is often used by those who wish to argue againts a new policy of proposal for change. The slippery slope fallacy assumes, without evidence, that a given event is the first in a series of steps that will lead inevitably to some outcome. Because the argument fails to provide evidence or support for the claim that some event will lead to some predicted consequences, it is a fallacy of evidence use. We can say that the form of a slippery slope fallacy is like the following description: If A is permitted, then by a gradual series of small steps through B, C,.......X,Y, eventually Z will be too. We should not permit Z. Therefore, we should not permit A. Below is an example of a slippery slope fallacy:

Studi tur yang baru lalu dimanfaatkan oleh para mahasiswa untuk berekreasi sementara mereke juga mendapat kesempatan untuk lari dari rutinitas kuliah. Jika ini dibiarkan terus, di lain waktu para mahasiswa yang merasa bosan dengan kuliahnya akan mengikuti studi tur guna memperoleh izin tidak ikut kuliah.

The xample above concerns about the last study tour that was abused by several students as a means to cut off classes. However, the speaker committed a slippery slope fallacy when he stated that in the near future students will joing the study tour if they want to escape from class without any proofs that the predicted event will occur.

2. Fallacies of Grounding

Warnick and Inch[10] noted that fallacies of grounding result from either the use of poor evidence or no evidence whatsoever. A poorly grounded argument would confuse the reader as the argument's claim is drawn from either missing or inappropriate premises. There are two types of this fallacy: begging the question and non sequitur.

a. *Begging the question*

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[10] Warnick and Inch, Op. Cit. 145)

It is also known as circular argument that assume the premise as the evidence of an argument the very claim or point that is in question. In other words, in this kind of fallacy, the argument's premises are used as the claims. Any form of argument in which the conclusion occurs as one of the premises, or a chain of arguments in which the final conclusion is a premises of one of the earlier arguments in the chain. The problem is that the truth of the premises that are being used as the claims have not been accepted yet by the reader. Below is the example of a begging the question fallcy:

Referendum perlu dilakukan karena dibutuhkan oleh masyarakat.

In this example, the arguer simlpy stated his claim in a different phrase, the word "perlu" has the same meaning with "dibutuhkan" , but providing a synonym does not constitute proof of why the referendum in the example is said to be "perlu".

b. Non Sequitur

Non sequitur in Latin means " it does not allow". The non sequitur fallacy contains a claim that is irrelevant to or unspported by the evidenve or premises purportedly supporting it. In other words, the writer grounds the argument in evidence that fails to support the claim advanced. Hefferman and Lincoln [11] labeled this kind of fallacy as "off the point argument". Below is an example of a non seqitur fallacy:

Dikarenakan studi tur yang baru lalu dimanfaatkan oleh para mahaiswa untuk bersenang-senang saja tanpa adanya esensi pendidikan di dalamnya, maka kegiatan tersebut harus diganti dengan program Kursus Bahasa Inggris.

In the given example, the claim does not have any direct connection with the premis since the claim of having an English Course Program to substitute the study tour

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[11] Hefferman and Lincoln,Op. Cit. hal 129-130

fails to provide any further duscussion of why it should replace the study tour nor it its advantages.

3. Fallacaies of Language Use

Most fallacies of language use are intentional. Fallacies of language use usually are used to get the claims accepted by the reader while deliberately try to evade issues and avoid presenting solid evidence and reasoning in favor of what they advocate. Warnick and Inch[12] classifies this kind of fallacy into: equivocation, amphiboly, and emotive language.

a. *Equivocation*

Many words contain more than one meaning, and occasionlly arguers may exploit the ambiguity in language to make a fallacious claim. Equivocation exploits the fact that a word has more than one meaning to lead a false conclusion. Equivocation is often used in deceptive advertising. Hefferman and Lincoln[13] referred to the use of words that fail to clarify their clear meaning as "vaguenes." Below is an axample of this kind of fallacy in an advertisement:

Kursus Komputer ANU menerima peserta kursus. Gratis biaya kursus.

The advertisement above is considered as an example of an equivocation when the word "gratis", which actually means without charge, cost or obligarion for most people has different meaning to the producer of the advertisement, that is, for an instance, investing money in"the tax free open-end mutual funds and unit trusts" and pay a variety of administrative 'charges and expenses."

b. *Amphiboly*

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[12] Warnick and Inch, Op. Cit. hal. 154.
[13] Hefferman and Lincoln, Op. Cit.hal. 130

Amphiboly exploits ambiguity in the grammatical structure of a sentence to deceive readers. Below is an example of an amphiboly from an advertisement:

Produk kami baru, lebih bagus dan tak perlu sangsi lagi lebih efektif.

The example above is an amphiboly because it uses comparative adjective such as "lebih bagus" dan "lebih efektif", but there is no object provided for comparison.

c. *The Use of Emotive Language*

The use of emotive language can manipulate the connotative meaning of words to establish a claim without proof. It attempts to persuade the reader by getting them to respond emotionally to images and associations evoked by the language use rather than judging the quality of the writer's evidence and reasoning. Below is an example of the use of emotive language:

Setelah bertahun-tahun diteliti dan diujicoba, seorang ilmuwan dari ITB akhirnya dapat mengembangkan sebuah formula ajaib untuk menurunkan berat badan yang terbuki nyata sebagai zat pembakar lemak paling manjurt di seluruh Indonesia. Produk ini hebat sehingga dapat mewujudkan impian anda untuk memiliki tubuh langsung.

The above example is considered as an argument with the use of deliberate emotive language because "sang ilmuwan ITB" is not identified nor the method used in the supposed study explained. The uses of words such as *ajaib, kuat, hebat*, ect., in the exemple often substitute for hard evidence and valid reasoning in order to make the claim persuasive for unaware readers.

CONCLUSION

Logical meaning in fallacies have been used and abused in communicaton but especially in argumentative discourses. This presentation may be said doubled-edged. On the other hand, by understanding fallacies in the world of argumentation, it can invite spekers and writers of argumentative composition to avoid using and

abusing logical fallacies. In another way, it is also hoped that readers and listeners are aware of the presence of fallacies in argumentative discourses.

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