

HYPERBOLIC EXPRESSIONS AMONG NEWLY MOTHERS IN TEXT-BASED VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

The present study examined the use of hyperbolic expressions in a text-based virtual communication context, specifically in an Indonesian newly mothers' online chat room. The study employed a descriptive qualitative method to analyze 60 utterances containing hyperbolic expressions taken from the Mom Sharing WhatsApp group. The hyperbolic expressions used by the mothers were identified based on McCarthy & Carter's (2004) characterization. The collected data were then categorized into seven forms of hyperbole proposed by Claridge (2010), and the possible functions behind the use of this figurative language were analyzed qualitatively based on the overall contexts. Results reveal that six forms of hyperbole were used in the chat room, namely single-word hyperbole, phrasal hyperbole, clausal hyperbole, numerical hyperbole, the role of superlative, and comparison. Furthermore, the expressions were found to serve various functions, namely to express emotions, to concretize the message and evoke imagination, to create humour, and to establish group identity. These findings contribute to the ongoing discourse on the use of hyperbole in everyday communication.

Keywords: figurative language, hyperbolic expression, text-based virtual communication

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji penggunaan ungkapan hiperbolik dalam konteks komunikasi virtual berbasis teks, khususnya dalam grup obrolan online ibu-ibu baru di Indonesia. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif untuk menganalisis 60 ujaran yang mengandung ungkapan hiperbolik yang diambil dari grup WhatsApp Mom Sharing. Ungkapan-ungkapan hiperbolik yang digunakan oleh para ibu diidentifikasi berdasarkan karakterisasi McCarthy & Carter (2004). Data yang terkumpul kemudian dikategorikan ke dalam tujuh bentuk hiperbola yang diusulkan oleh Claridge (2010), dan fungsi-fungsi yang mungkin ada di balik penggunaan bahasa kiasan ini dianalisis secara kualitatif berdasarkan konteks secara keseluruhan. Hasil penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa terdapat enam bentuk hiperbola yang digunakan dalam grup obrolan tersebut, yaitu hiperbola berupa kata tunggal, hiperbola berupa frasa, hiperbola berupa klausa, hiperbola berupa angka, peran superlatif, dan perbandingan. Selain itu, ungkapan-ungkapan tersebut ditemukan berfungsi untuk berbagai tujuan, seperti untuk mengungkapkan emosi, mengonkretkan pesan dan membangkitkan imajinasi, menciptakan humor, dan menetapkan identitas kelompok. Temuan ini memberikan kontribusi pada diskusi yang terus berlangsung mengenai penggunaan hiperbola dalam komunikasi sehari-hari.

Kata kunci: bahasa kiasan, ekspresi hiperbolik, komunikasi virtual berbasis teks

INTRODUCTION

Motherhood is tough. This statement is relatively familiar among mothers and seems to be realistic considering a number of communities who are massively campaigning a kind of Moms-Support-Moms movement around the world. On social media, such movement comes in various platforms so that it can be widely accessed, and mothers can easily connect with each other. For instance, many accounts on Facebook (e.g., *Grown and Flown Parents*, *The Mom Squad*, and *Mom Life*), X (e.g., @mommymundo, @themomcomplex, and @MMM4Mothers), or Instagram (e.g., @crystalclearmoms, @mother.ly, and @momsmom.id), regularly discuss motherhood life, and some of them also offer their followers to further join their 24/7 supportive online chat room. Mostly, they will be allowed to share any experiences as a mother, and they will have the opportunity to get some peer support from the other members.

One of the online chat rooms with similar mission is known as *Mom Sharing*. It is a WhatsApp group created in early 2021, which currently consists of more than 200 newly mothers from various regions in Indonesia. To date, despite limited personal acquaintance, every member is fairly active in sharing as well as responding to each other's issues, most of which are child-related. In expressing their thoughts and feelings, it is interesting to note that they occasionally use various figurative languages – a way of using words or expressions with different meanings from their conventional interpretation. This phenomenon could be common in such text-based virtual communication due to a number of limitations it has. By way of illustration, it is believed that people will involve less contextual features compared to those in face-to-face interactions (Budiarti, 2022; Yus, 2011). The absence of extra lingual elements, such as voice intonation, facial expressions, and body gestures could lead to the need of employing several linguistic strategies which are essential for seeking the interlocutors' attention as well as gaining a correct interpretation from them. In other words, it is likely to present greater challenges to make sure that the ideas are conveyed as intended and can be well received by the other members in the chat room.

Among many other types available, hyperbole is found as one of the most frequently used figurative languages by the mothers in *Mom Sharing* WhatsApp group. Hyperbole, or also called an overstatement, is broadly defined as an exaggerated assertion deliberately used to create dramatic effects (Barnwell, 1980). Ruminda & Kharimah (2017) similarly argue that it is a kind of an excessive pronouncement as a means of creating a certain pressure and impression as well as giving greater and more valuable impact. Furthermore, it is stated that figurative language is usually intended to shorten utterances (Nurgiyantoro, 2009), to concretize abstract things, and to evoke the interlocutors' imagination (Waluyo, 1987). As an instance, the phrase "I'm so hungry I could eat a horse!" serves as a hyperbolic expression, which could emphasize extreme hunger. It is an exaggerated way of saying that someone is very hungry, to the extent that they could eat an enormous amount of food, even something as large as a horse, although they would not actually do so. It is not meant to be taken literally but rather to convey a strong feeling of hunger. Based on these points, it can be hypothesized that the use of hyperbole in the online chat room is generally motivated by an intention to ensure that the readers will be able to fully understand their messages despite not having direct conversations by sharing their stories using words that truly represent what they experience and feel. However, it has to be highlighted that to express something hyperbolically is different from an act of lying (McCarthy

& Carter, 2004). It is simply another way to communicate more effectively that the recipients are usually still able to get the actual points effortlessly.

In light of its general roles, a lot of previous researchers seem to be more interested in examining the use of hyperbole in various literary works, such as poems (Ali, 2018; Bashiri & Shagoshtasbi, 2021; Halawachy & Alobaidy, 2020), novels (Aprila, 2022; Hidayat & Supriyanto, 2017; Sutopo, 2014), songs (Asmorowati & Pramitasari, 2022; Astina et al., 2021; Triwulandari et al., 2016), and movies (Najoan et al., 2021; Rubianto, 2018). Some of them also have investigated the use of hyperbole in advertisements (Huang, 2020; Sari & Kristanto, 2017; Wijaya, 2022), stand up comedies (Sudarsono & Pukan, 2022), and political discourses (Abbas, 2019; Al-Dalawi & Al-Mahdawi, 2019; Golubeva, 2019). It is true that this figurative language heavily appears there, but it also commonly pops up in everyday communication. Thus, it is noteworthy that this study is meant to fill the gap. Unlike the previous related studies carried out by Mirzakhililova (2022), Christodoulidou (2011), and McCarthy & Carter (2004), which mainly concerned on direct communication, this study focuses on the use of hyperbole in a case of text-based virtual one, which is known to have its own characteristics. Involving *Mom Sharing WhatsApp* group as the data source, this paper is specifically aimed at revealing the forms and functions of hyperbolic expressions used by the members of the group, namely Indonesian newly mothers. It is expected that the results of this study are able to give a significant contribution to the ongoing discourse.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive qualitative method. The data used in this study were 60 written utterances containing hyperbolic expressions taken from *Mom Sharing WhatsApp* group from January to December 2022. As previously mentioned, the members of the chat room are more than 200 Indonesian newly mothers who have an average of one child since its foundation.

Since one of the researchers is also an active member of the WhatsApp group, the data were collected by implementing *simak* and *catat* methods, namely by purposively observing the use of hyperbolic expressions by the mothers across various languages and then taking notes on them (Sudaryanto, 1993). In identifying the expressions, this study adopted McCarthy & Carter's (2004) characterization. According to them, an utterance can be categorized as a hyperbole if it displays at least three of these criteria: (1) disjunction of context, (2) shifts of footing, (3) counterfactuality not perceived as a lie, (4) impossible worlds, (5) listener take-up, (6) extreme case formulations and intensification, and (7) relevant interpretability.

Next, the collected data were categorized into seven forms of hyperbole proposed by Claridge (2010), namely single-word hyperbole, phrasal hyperbole, clausal hyperbole, numerical hyperbole, the role of superlative, comparison, and repetition, and the possible functions or purposes behind the use of this figurative language by the newly mothers were then analyzed qualitatively based on the overall contexts. For convenience purposes, the name of every person mentioned in the sample data will be displayed under a pseudonym.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Forms of Hyperbolic Expressions among Newly Mothers in the Chat Room

After analyzing the data, this study revealed that six out of the seven forms of hyperbole proposed by Claridge (2010) were present, in which repetition is the non-existent one.

Table 1. Forms of Hyperbole among Newly Mothers in the Chat Room

No.	Forms of Hyperbole	Amount of Data
1	Single-Word Hyperbole	11
2	Phrasal Hyperbole	17
3	Clausal Hyperbole	19
4	Numerical Hyperbole	1
5	The Role of Superlative	1
6	Comparison	11
7	Repetition	0
Total		60

Table 1 shows that clausal hyperbole is the most frequently occurring form, with a total of 19 utterances out of the 60 collected data. Phrasal hyperbole follows closely behind with 17 utterances, while both single-word hyperbole and comparison have 11 utterances each. Next, numerical hyperbole and the role of superlative have the least frequency, with only 1 utterance each. These results will be discussed further in the following sections.

Single-Word Hyperbole

In this study, single-word hyperbole in an utterance is made up of one word only used in exaggerated manner. Several instances of this are presented below.

- (1) *Jgn2 Umar **pingsan**, bukan tidur abis dikeleki mb Ita*
‘Maybe Umar didn’t fall asleep, but fainted after being under Ms. Ita’s armpit’
- (2) *Daffa ini klo emang ud pingin bobok langsung nggletak cari lengan, dipukpuk bntar sama diajak berdoa trus bobok... tapi klo ngantuknya efek obat baru **ngereog***
‘Daffa, when he wants to sleep, he will immediately lay down, find a comfortable position, be cuddled for a while, pray, and then sleep. But if his drowsiness is caused by the side effects of medication, he will act like a reog.’
- (3) *Ongkirnya **menggila***
‘The shipping cost is crazy’

The word *pingsan* ‘fainted’ in Datum (1) can be seen as a hyperbole considering that Ms. Ita is known to have an unpleasant body odor. This understanding stems from the speaker’s previous chat in the room, which appears that there have been ongoing complaints about Ms. Ita’s body odor as follows.

Jadi yaa... Udah lama benernya ngeluhin ini tuh, mbak ita tuh orangnya BB (bau badan). Udah beberapa kali tiap aku pulang kantor Umar tuh jadi bau kecutnya mbak ita. Aku ngak sukaaa anakku bau kecut gitu, kecutnya karna kan digendongin mbak ita tuh.
‘So, you know... I’ve been complaining about this for a while. Ms. Ita has an unpleasant body odor. Several times when I come home from the office, Umar smells like Ms. Ita’s body odor. I don’t like it when my child smells like that, it’s because Ms. Ita carries him and he picks up her body odor.’

Drawing from the presented context, the suggestion that Umar fainted solely from the body odor is an exaggeration and not meant to be taken literally. It is more likely an exaggerated or humorous way of expressing how strong and unpleasant Ms. Ita's body odor is perceived to be. As for Datum (2), it features the hyperbolic term *ngereog*, which is not a standard Indonesian word. The speaker formed this term by adding a non-standard Indonesian prefix *nge-* to the base noun *reog*, which refers to a traditional dance originating from Ponorogo, East Java, Indonesia. The intention of this alteration is to transform *reog* into a verb and emphasize the dance's intensity. *Reog* involves forceful head movements that resemble those of distressed or uncomfortable children as presented by the utterance. Next, instead of saying *mahal* 'expensive', the speaker of Datum (3) chose to use the word *menggila* 'crazy' to describe the shipping cost. This hyperbolic expression suggests that the shipping cost is so exorbitantly high that it seems almost insane or crazy. This choice of language adds a dramatic effect to the statement as well as highlights the speaker's strong emotional reaction to the discussed topic.

Phrasal Hyperbole

The following are several utterances containing hyperbolic expression in the form of phrase.

- (4) *Kemarin dinebul, mik susu trus muntah sekasur2*
'Yesterday, he was nebulized, drank milk, and vomited all over the bed'
- (5) *Nemu harga murce bahagianya sampe keubun2*
'Finding a cheap price makes me happy to the crown of my head'
- (6) *Hahaha... Pengabdi nen bundaaa*
'Hahaha... The servant of mother's breasts'

The phrase *muntah sekasur2* as presented in Datum (4) is considered a hyperbole due to the fact that the amount of vomit produced by a baby is unlikely to be large enough to fill a single bed, or it is highly impossible to occur in the real life. A similar case can also be seen from Datum (5), in which the feeling of extreme happiness was expressed by *bahagianya sampe keubun2* instead of simply saying "makes me very happy". Next, it is common that the word *pengabdi* is associated with worship, but in the context shown by Datum (6), the speaker appears to be describing a baby who is constantly attached to his mother to be breastfed. However, expressing an immense amount of love towards a mother using this term is excessive and unrealistic. Therefore, such an expression cannot be taken literally or performed physically in daily life.

Clausal Hyperbole

As the most frequently occurring form of hyperbole in the chat room, the following are several instances of the expressions in the form of a clause.

- (7) *G bayangin klo pas lahiran bidannya dy, bisa balik perut lagi debaynya g jadi keluar*
'I can't imagine if she has that midwife when giving birth. It's possible that the baby might turn back and not willing to come out'
- (8) *Aku cuma bernafas aja jadi lemak kek nyaaa*
'I feel like I gain weight just by breathing'

(9) *Kekurusan dy, ditiup angin langsung terbang*

'She's too skinny. Once blown by the wind, she can fly right away'

The hyperbolic expression in Datum (7) is bolded. It exaggerates the possible negative outcome of having a particular midwife present during childbirth. In a normal situation, it is doubtful for a baby to "turn back" and refuse to come out during labor just because of a midwife's presence. This expression is used to emphasize the speaker's negative perception or fear of that particular midwife, suggesting that the midwife's presence could result in a disastrous situation during the childbirth. In Datum (8), the bolded clause exaggerates the speaker's perception of how easily she gains weight. In reality, it is almost improbable to gain weight just by breathing as weight gain is typically the result of consuming more calories than one burns. This appears to emphasize the speaker's anxiety about their weight, suggesting that even small actions such as breathing can contribute to their weight gain. The same case can be seen from Datum (9), which exaggerates the speaker's perception of the person's weight and fragility, implying that even a slight breeze could carry them away to emphasize her opinion that the person is too skinny.

Comparison

Comparison is occasionally used by the mothers to exaggerate their utterances in the chat room. The instances can be seen below.

(10) ***MENCEKAAAM KAYAK SUASANA G30SPKI PERJALANAN 30 MENIT***

'A 30-MINUTE JOURNEY THAT FEELS INTIMIDATING LIKE THE G30SPKI ATMOSPHERE'

(11) ***Diglonggong kek sapi aja biar awet gendutnya***

'Just give a lot of water like a cow to keep her fat'

(12) *Daffa ini klo kadung cocok maemnya bisa abis sepiring org dewasa buk, klo kadung g cocok **kek reog**..*

'Daffa, if he likes the food, he can finish a portion that's enough for an adult, but if he doesn't like it, he will act like he's doing the Reog dance.'

To describe her awful journey experience, the mother in Datum (10) used the G30SPKI atmosphere as its comparison. In the Indonesian context, this likely refers to an intimidating or threatening situation, similar to the feeling of the political unrest during the G30SPKI event. Next, Datum (11) presents a hyperbolic expression since it is unlikely for babies to be adequately nourished solely by providing them a large amount of water. The speaker compared this context with how cows are given water to appear plump and attractive to buyers. As such, it is also plausible to interpret this utterance as sarcasm as it is not an appropriate method for ensuring proper infant nutrition. This may be attributed to the shared concern of many new mothers to maintain their baby's weight within the guidelines suggested by the World Health Organization (WHO). Besides that, it is interesting to note that the term *reog* has recently gained popularity among mothers especially in the *Mom Sharing* WhatsApp group, or it appears to be a common hyperbole since the mothers in the chat room frequently use it. Besides referring to the children's acts when feeling uncomfortable as indicated in Datum (2), this term is also often compared to the way babies or children eat when they dislike the food as shown in Datum (12).

Numerical Hyperbole

As the term suggests, numerical hyperbole involves numbers to create an excessive meaning in an utterance. In the present study, this type occurred once, and the following is the utterance.

(13) *Tidurnya mode lampu 1000watt dinyalain*

‘She sleeps with the 1000-watt lamp mode turning on’

The expression clearly exaggerates the intensity of light that a person uses when sleeping. To sleep with a 1000-watt lamp turned on would never be recommended for anyone as it would be extremely bright and potentially disruptive. This utterance was actually a response to another member’s statement that she regularly applies sunscreen even at night. Based on this context, it seems that the speaker is trying to emphasize her perception of the person’s behavior as excessive or unnecessary.

The Role of Superlative

This type of hyperbole involves exaggerating the degree or quality of something to its utmost extent. It is often used to create a sense of extreme or excessive emphasis. The following presents the only-one datum found in this study.

(14) *Di komplek sebutannya Maryam bayi toddler teramah karena setiap orang di kasih senyuman*

‘In my neighbourhood, Maryam is called the friendliest toddler baby because she gives everyone a smile’

Based on the utterance above, it can be stated that the speaker exaggerates Maryam’s friendliness by claiming that she is the friendliest toddler in the entire neighbourhood. It seems unlikely that Maryam is the friendliest one as there are likely many other friendly toddlers around. However, this expression is used to emphasize Maryam’s friendly nature and the positive impact she has on those around her. It suggests that Maryam is particularly kind and welcoming, always greeting others with a smile. In other words, the use of hyperbole in this context is meant to emphasize the speaker’s admiration for Maryam and her actions. It highlights Maryam’s ability to bring joy to those around her and create a positive atmosphere in the neighbourhood.

Last but not least, the preliminary findings of this study regarding a relatively equal amount of data on single-word hyperbole, phrasal hyperbole, and clausal hyperbole suggests that hyperbole remains an effective tool for text-based communication, particularly on WhatsApp, regardless of its length, as there are no character limitations on the platform. Furthermore, the absence of repetition as a type of hyperbole supports Sudarsono & Pukan’s (2022) argument that hyperbolic expressions created through this type are more commonly used in oral communication. It might be due to the nature of speech that in oral communication, speakers have more opportunities to use nonverbal cues such as tone of voice, facial expressions, and body language to emphasize their words and create an impact on the listener. Meanwhile, in text-based communication, repetition may be perceived as redundant or overbearing if used excessively. Additionally, text-based language often relies on different techniques such as descriptive language, metaphor, and analogy to convey a message, whereas oral communication is more spontaneous and relies on repetition and other forms of emphasis to

make a point. However, it is important to note that repetition as a form of hyperbole can still be used effectively in text-based communication when used judiciously in an appropriate context.

Functions of Hyperbolic Expressions among Newly Mothers in the Chat Room

Considering the context, it appears that the hyperbolic expressions used by the newly mothers in *Mom Sharing* WhatsApp group serve at least four functions as follows.

To express emotions

Generally, it is found that hyperbolic expressions among the mothers in this text-based virtual communication are often used to express certain emotions. By opting for a more extreme word choice, the speaker is able to convey the seriousness of the situation in a vivid and memorable way, leaving a lasting impression on the listener or reader. In other words, they are often used to intensify and emphasize feelings. The examples of this function can be seen from Datum (3), (5), and (10). The use of *menggila*, *bahagiaanya sampe keubun2*, and *MENCEKAAAM KAYAK SUASANA G30SPKI* can be considered as an effective rhetorical device that helps the mothers to express and convey their emotions in a way that is powerful and impactful.

To concretize the message and evoke imagination

Figurative language, including hyperbole, is generally known to function as a way to concretize the message and evoke imagination by making abstract concepts more tangible and vivid (Napitupulu & Rusli, 2019). It is believed that exaggerating certain aspects of a message can draw attention to those aspects and make them more memorable and meaningful as well as create a heightened sense of drama or intensity that can capture the listener's or reader's imagination. This function is also found in *Mom Sharing* WhatsApp group. For example, the utterance *Tidurnya mode lampu 1000watt dinyalain* as in Datum (13) is a hyperbolic statement that exaggerates how brightly the lamp is shining while the person is sleeping. Based on the context, the speaker is likely to express this to convey a sense of annoyance with another member of the group stated that she regularly applies sunscreen even at night. Another example can be seen from the phrase *muntah sekasur2* in Datum (4). It serves to create a vivid and unexpected image of how much the baby has thrown up in bed. By using this hyperbolic expression, the speaker is emphasizing the extent of the mess and suggesting that the vomit has been spread all around the bed. It is expected to evoke the other members' imagination because it creates a very clear mental image of the scene. The reader can imagine a bed covered in vomit, with the smell and mess that would accompany such an event. This hyperbolic expression is likely used to emphasize the severity of the situation, to convey a sense of disgust or revulsion, or to create a memorable and impactful image in the reader's mind.

To create humour

It appears that hyperbolic expressions in this context also serve as a way to create humour and make light of situations that might otherwise be stressful or overwhelming. In this context, this figurative language is often used to take something ordinary and make it sound ridiculous or outrageous as can be seen in Datum (6), (8), and (9). Additionally, the present study identified that this function is mostly observed through the use of comparisons as follows.

- (15) *Cakep ga ma orge kalau cakep tak sambat kalau jelek kyk pocong aku ga mau*
'Is he handsome? If he is, I'll take him, but if he is ugly like a ghost, I won't'
- (16) *Orang kaya ma, baju sekali pake kek sterofoam*
'If someone is rich, their clothes will be disposable like Styrofoam'
- (17) *G sampe nangis2 sih, cman jadi absurd bgt kek org mabok*
'It didn't make him cry, but he just became really absurd like a drunkard'

The bold part in Datum (15) implies that the person referred to is extremely unattractive, while the one in Datum (16) implies that rich people are wasteful and do not place much value on their clothing. It is important to note that hyperbole should not be taken literally. It is basically meant to be humorous and create a light-hearted atmosphere. Based on these utterances, it can be seen that the speakers attempt to emphasize a particular aspect of a situation in a comical way. Moreover, hyperbole among the mothers is also found as a form of self-deprecating humour, where they tend to use it to poke fun at her own parenting struggles as exemplified in Datum (17).

To establish group identity

Previously, it has been stated that the word *reog* as presented in Datum (2) and (12) was frequently used by the members of *Mom Sharing* WhatsApp group (appearing 23 times during the research period). It can be implied that when people use hyperbole in conversation, they often use language that is familiar and can be easily understood within a particular group or community since this can be a way of signaling membership and shared values or experiences. In other words, this can help to establish a sense of shared identity and understanding or solidarity among speakers of the same language or culture.

Among the four functions mentioned, the use of hyperbole as a tool to express emotion emerges as the most frequent in the chat room. It indicates that in a text-based virtual communication, hyperbolic expressions more often serve to emphasize feelings or reactions, making emotional communication more vivid and impactful in online interactions where conveying feelings can be challenging without facial expressions or tone of voice.

CONCLUSION

The present study examined hyperbolic expressions in text-based virtual communication among new mothers in a WhatsApp group. It is found that these expressions serve similar functions as they do in direct face-to-face conversations. Furthermore, it can be stated that hyperbole serves as an effective tool for the newly mothers to cope with the challenges of motherhood by providing a sense of relief and alleviating stress and anxiety. Additionally, the playful exaggeration used in the hyperbolic expressions allows the mothers to create a supportive and light-hearted atmosphere in their online communities. The importance of hyperbole in these virtual spaces cannot be overstated, as it plays a crucial role in the social interactions among mothers and helps to foster a sense of understanding. Thus, the results of this study have significant implications for the use of hyperbole in virtual communication and its potential to enhance the well-being of new mothers.

Some potential limitations of this study could be its small sample size, which may not be representative of all hyperbolic expressions used in the *Mom Sharing* WhatsApp group or in

virtual communication contexts in general. Additionally, the study only focused on hyperbole used by Indonesian newly mothers, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other cultural and demographic groups. Nevertheless, this initial study is expected to provide valuable insights for other researchers who are interested in conducting similar studies in this field and may serve as a foundation for further research in this area.

NOTE

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