



Freshman EFL Learners' Use of Attitude Verbs and Considerations in Their Propositional Attitude Expressions

Berlin Sibarani

berlinsibarani@unimed.ac.id
Fakultas Bahasa dan Seni
Universitas Negeri Medan
Medan - Indonesia

Abstract

This study is intended to describe the underlying consideration of the Indonesian EFL learners in choosing attitude verbs to express their propositional attitude towards an object. The data of this study were elicited by asking the students to write their propositional attitudes towards familiar and unfamiliar pictures of objects. The familiarity of an object to the students were suspected to be one of the students' considerations. The elicited written expressions were identified, classified and compared by using the concept of attitude verbs as the temporary predetermined perspective. The results of the identification and classification analysis show that propositional attitude was expressed in three ways: by using verbs of attitude of *look*, *think* and hidden verb attitude. The use of *look* (85%) dominates the other two verbs. The use of hidden verbs attitude occurs 12%, and the verb *think* is the least occurrence (3%). While the results of the comparison analysis show that familiarity of an object is not the only factor that the students consider in using attitude verbs. Their ability to think of what they see, that is labelled as psychological factor, and their sensitivity to the social effect of their propositional attitude, that is called as social factor, also influence their consideration in using the attitude verbs. Based on these results, it is concluded that the use of attitude words among the EFL learners is not only a reflection of their linguistic ability but also a reflection of their social sensitivity.

Keywords: *Attitude verbs, Consideration, EFL learners, Propositional attitude,*



Introduction

Freshman EFL learners are in the process of developing their English mastery towards native-like speakers. Learners' language development was known as interlanguage- that was introduced forty years ago by Corder (1982). Walenta (2019) said that the interlanguage develops both in forms and function. Pragmatics development occurs in interlanguage. Schauer (2009) found that the making of request, as one part of pragmatics, occurs through a series of steps, namely through the development of pragmatics awareness consisting of error recognition and awareness of the learners' rating behavior, request strategies, internal and external request modification. This means that before saying something, a speaker should be aware of what to say and be aware of his purpose of saying it as well as its consequences to the listener.

Propositional attitude refers to a psychological judgment of a speaker or writer towards an object. This judgement results in his awareness of his attitude which will be expressed in certain statement chosen based on his awareness of his attitude and his awareness of his listener or his pragmatics awareness. This showed the relationship between a speaker's propositional attitude and pragmatics awareness.

In his ability to express his propositional attitude based on his pragmatic awareness is affected by his level of linguistic knowledge and skills. This leads to an inference that in expressing one's propositional attitude is affected by three factors, namely (1) his awareness of his attitude, (2) pragmatic awareness and (3) his mastery of his linguistic knowledge and skills. Freshman students, as the subjects of this study, are in the interlanguage development who may have some limitation in linguistic knowledge and skills. Propositional attitude and pragmatics considerations are individual attributes which vary from one subject to another subject. Within this



context, a search of how the EFL learner's use of the attitude verbs and their considerations in expressing their propositional attitude.

Proposition in the sentence is indicated by a single predicate of the sentence. Besides producing a sentence describing an object, a speaker or a writer also expresses his attitude towards the sentence propositions. The attitude is the product of psychological judgments of the speaker or a writer. Such judgment varies in degree and the judgment is realized by the use of verbs like *believe*, *think*, *look*, *seem*, etc. These verbs are called the attitude verbs. The choice of these verbs represents the attitude degree of a speaker or writer.

Psychological judgment of a speaker or writer is a mental or cognitive process taking place in evaluating the world, or in deciding his psychological tendency to the world or objects. The process involved the interaction between the prior knowledge or schemata the speaker or writer had possessed and the world or objects. The process leads to certain psychological state tendency towards the world or the objects. Such judgment takes place only when there had been prior knowledge related to the objects or the world. The depth and amount of the prior knowledge affects the degree of the attitude. The degree is expressed in the choice of the attitude verbs: whether it is expressed with *believe*, *think*, *seems*, etc. The prior knowledge is developed in cognition through experience. This elaboration of *attitude* is focused on the psychology perspective.

In addition to the psychology perspective, Crano and Prislin (2008) stated that the formation of the attitude towards the objects or world is also affected by the social factor. The attitude expression is dependent on the social factor considerations. One of the considerations is to maintain harmony among the social community. The choice of the attitude verbs is carefully done in order not to have other people with negative thinking towards the speaker.

This means that the process of forming and expressing attitude is affected by two factors, namely the psychological and the social factors. The psychological factor is internal to the speaker or writer. It is about the prior knowledge and ability to judge and evaluate the objects or the world. While the second factor is an external



factor. It is about his feeling of sensitivity and appreciation towards the people around him in a community and about his care of placing himself in harmony with his community.

The prior knowledge is closely related to one's experiences about an object or world. An object or the world about which one has no experience causes one to have no prior knowledge about the object. This also means that the object or the world is unfamiliar with him. Such mental state may cause one to express low degree of attitude towards the world or objects. On the other way around, one who has a lot of experiences about the world or the objects, the world or the objects are familiar with him. He will be able to produce high degree of attitude. Based on the elaboration, it may be concluded that two factors affecting the attitude towards proposition, namely (1) psychological factor and (2) social factor. The status of an object or the world- whether it is familiar or unfamiliar to a speaker or writer- closely related to the amount of prior knowledge one has about the world or object. The familiarity level may cause one to be able or not to be able to express his propositional attitude.

Attitudes are powerful bases for making group stereotypical or normative inferences about other attitudes and about behaviours and customs. Attitudes are represented in memory as summary evaluations associated with the attitude object. Although the object-evaluation associations are supposedly integrated into broader representational networks, the model concentrates on the strength of the association between an evaluation and an attitude object. This is called known as memory as the primary basis for judgments. According to this model, attitude accessibility is determined by the strength of the association between an attitude object and its evaluation. When the object evaluation link is strong, the attitude is highly accessible and exposure to the attitude object will activate the prior evaluation. This automatic process is important because activated evaluations can guide thought and behaviour in the presence of the attitude object. For example, highly accessible attitudes exert strong influences on behaviour and can bias perceptions of attitude objects. To this extent, information about an object is likely to have a different impact depending on whether or not people possess a prior accessible attitude.



Believe and *hope* belong to a broad class of verbs which are often referred to as propositional attitude verbs, because they take a propositional argument (expressed as a complement clause) and denote the mental state or attitude of an experiencer toward this proposition (Kroeger, 2020).

1. a. John believes [that the airplane was invented by an Irishman].
b. Henry hoped [to find the fountain of youth].

In 1a, the proposition is *believe*, meaning that 1a is about *John's believe*; not about *the invention of the air plane*. In the same way, 1b is about *Henry's hope*; not about *the finding of the fountain of youth*. So 1a and 1b convey the information of the mental state or attitude of *John* and *Henry* towards their complements. Thus the denotation of their complement clauses is not their truth value but the propositions they express. In addition to the words, *think*, and *looks* also belong to attitude verbs.

Proposition, according Clark and Clark (1977), is a unit of meaning of a sentence which is syntactical in nature. It is not pragmatics meaning nor the speaker's intention. Every sentence has at least a single unit of meaning. A sentence which has a single unit of meaning is called simple sentence. Complex sentences have more than one unit of meaning and among them there is a unit of meaning that is considered as the main meaning or the main proposition and the others are supporting propositions.

2. a. The rich woman rides a luxurious car
b. the woman is rich
c. the car is luxurious
d. the woman rides a car

In 2a, there are three propositions, and the main proposition is 2d. While 2b and 2c are supporting propositions. So 2a is about the information *that the woman rides a car* and it is the main meaning of the sentence.



Propositional attitude expressions, in Clark and Clark's perception (1977), is a complex sentence that they labelled as a sentence consisting noun clause or complementation, as in 3.

3. a. Mr. Brown believed that the student passed the test.
- b. Mr. Brown believed [it]
- c. the student passed the test [= it].

In 3a, there are two propositions, in which 3b is the main proposition while 3c is supporting proposition. So 3a is about *Mr. Brown's believe*; not about the *student's passing of the test*.

In propositional attitude expression as elaborated by Kroeger (2020), when viewed from the perspective of Clark and Clark (1977), the *attitude* is contained in the main clause while the object of the attitude is contained in the subordinate clause or in the complementation of the sentence.

Method

The Data of the Study

The data of this study are the propositional attitude sentences written by the students of STBA PIA Medan. Elicitation technique was used to elicit these data; they were asked to write their attitude towards objects in pictures of both familiar and unfamiliar object to the students. This technique of data collection elicited 30 sentences and these sentences were taken as the data of the study. The data were listed as follows:

1. He looks friendly and humble with that hand gesture and small smile on his face
2. Her face looks angry and...
3. ... I think she was a snappy person
4. He is a hard-worker with his brown skin because he keeps riding his pedycab.
5. The car looks so big and spacious, it looks expensive and elegant too
6. It is an old iron, and it looks rusty and antique.
7. It is an electronic bike, it looks cute with its bright red color and small basket in front.
8. The hour glass looks old, antique with the curve shape on its body
9. He looks massy and unique with his style and...



10. ... from his face expression he looks interrupted
11. The washing machine looks elegant with its silver color
12. He looks like elite and arrogant with his face expression and his style.
13. She looks so friendly and beautiful
14. She looks stubborn with his mouth and his hand gesture, ..
15. ...he looks like explaining something.
16. He looks like a hard-worker person.
17. The silver car looks so elegant, spacious and expensive.
18. It looks expensive and sophisticated
19. He is being iconic with his hand gesture
20. He is just waving his hand as greeting
21. She looks stern and upset about something
22. His smile looks like business smile.
23. The washing machine looks modern and cut edge.
24. It doesn't look practical
25. It looks as time flows by the sand goes down.
26. He looks neat like a high class person
27. She must stay up all night since she has a pretty deep eyebags.
28. The car looks cool and sporty
29. The lady looks like in hurry
30. He looks tired as if he works a whole day
31. The car looks big and enough for whole family
32. He looks calm but upset during his interview
33. It looks plane but useful

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed by using the theories of attitude expression as the temporary category of identification and classification. The results showed that the subjects used mostly attitude verb *look*, 28 out of 33 (85%), *think/believe* 3%, and 12% hidden attitude verbs.

The attitude verb *Look* requires weaker judgement in comparison to that required by the verb attitude of *think* and *believe*. The use of *look* is mostly based on external consideration, that is mostly based on the appearance of the object; less personal judgement is required. It is resulted from the subject judgment towards the appearances of the picture. It is unlike *believe* and *think*. These verbs attitude require stronger judgement. They are based on more internal or personal consideration.



When compared to other verbs of attitude, like *think* and *believe*, the verb *look* conveys weak judgment. It is triggered by the external factor- that is from the appearance of the picture. It is resulted from the subject judgment towards the appearances of the picture. Unlike the judgment reflected by the attitudinal verbs like *believe* and *think*. The use of verb of attitude *think* is more internal or more personal. It is based on what was thought by the speaker. The use of verb of *believe* is even personally stronger than that of the use of *think*. In the 33 data, the subject used verb of attitude *think* once – one out of 33 (3%). The two facts – the occurrences of *look* and *think* (82% vs 3%) can be interpreted that the subjects prefer the use of *look* rather than that of *think*. The analysis also showed that the subjects produced propositional attitude without using any of the verbs of attitude. Such production occurred 4 times – 4 out of 33 or 12% (see data no. 4, 19, 20, 27). The result of this analysis is visually shown in table 1. In data 4, 19, 20, and 27 the subject attitudes were not explicitly stated with any verbs of attitude. However, if the data were intensively observed, they obviously showed their attitude. In data 4, *he is a hard-worker* is as a matter of fact the attitude of the subject. The data could be rewritten in 4*. *I think he is a hard-worker (4*)*. This attitude was resulted from his judgment towards the appearance in 4, namely *his brown skin because he keeps riding his pedycab*. Such analysis could be conducted to data 19, 20 and 27. To such data, hidden use of attitude verbs were labeled as *hidden attitude verbs*.

He is a hard-worker with his brown skin because he keeps riding his pedycab (no.4).

He is being iconic with his hand gesture (no.19)

He is just waving his hand as greeting (no.20)

She must stay up all night since she has a pretty deep eyebags (no.27).



Tabel 1. The Presence of Verbs of Attitude in Propositional Attitudes

No	Verbs of Attitude Used	Data Number	Occurrences (f)	%
1	Look	1, 2, 5 – 18, 21-33	28	85
2	Think/believe	3	1	3
3	Hidden	4, 19 -20, 27	4	12
Total		33	33	100

The three ways of expressing attitude to the pictures of both familiar and unfamiliar objects. This means that they do not mostly base their propositional attitude expressions towards the objects on the familiarity level or on their knowledge extents. In picture 1, the *gojek driver* must be very familiar with the subjects. However, the propositional attitude produced by the subject is *The driver of the motorcycle looks very hard working*, rather than *I think gojek driver is not a good job*. Picture 2 contained a picture of a famous singer in 1990s. Her name is Nike Ardilla. She was very popular in the years. The subjects must not have had any knowledge about this singer. Towards picture 2, the subject produced propositional attitudes as in *She must stay up all night since she has a pretty deep eyebags*. The subjects use hidden verb of attitude. The attitude was made by judging the appearance of the singer's eyes. The judgment was resulted from the comparisons between the singer's eyes appearances and the habit of a person having the same eyes appearances. Habit of such person was gained from the subjects experiences of the person who used to stay up late at night. In producing the propositional attitude toward picture 2, the subjects did not have any alternative except doing judgment by comparing the appearances and the experiences or prior knowledge related to the appearance. It was unlike towards picture one about which the subjects had a lot of prior knowledge based on which they could express many propositional attitudes. In other words, with picture one, the subjects had many choices or alternatives in expressing their attitudes. When the subjects decided to use the appearances of the *gojek driver* – instead of their prior knowledge – that they produced propositional attitude like *The driver of the motorcycle looks very hard working*, rather than *I think gojek driver is not a good job* was just a matter of social context consideration rather than psychological process. In



expressing his attitude towards the *gojek driver* the subject prefers to keep harmony with the people around him. He did not want them to think that the subject was not a considerate person. Keeping harmony in his community became the main consideration in expressing his propositional attitude.

Findings

Propositional attitude was produced with three ways, namely by using verb of attitude of *look*, *think* hidden verb attitude. The verb attitude of *look* is much more preferred than the other two verbs. The speaker or writer's using of the verb *looks* much more outstandingly is caused by two factors. Firstly, developing harmony with the people around him by the time the propositional attitude is produced is more easily gained since the use of *look* does not make the speaker superior to the listener. Secondly, the verb *look* in propositional attitude is more persuasive than that of the other two since the use of verb *look* is based on his judgment toward the appearances of the object the attitude is given to. Appearances of objects are open to everyone who sees the object. Therefore agreement from the listener to the propositional attitude is more easily obtained. Degree of familiarity of the object one gives attitude to does not affect the preference. The preference remains the same no matter the object of attitude is familiar or unfamiliar because social context consideration of the propositional attitude is more preferred. So it is not a matter of ability to do judgment by using the prior knowledge-this is commonly called *psychological factor*- but it is a matter of acceptability or harmony among the people in a community.

References

- Corder, SP. (1982). *Error Analysis and Interlanguage*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Carano and Prislín. (2008). *Attitude and Attitude Change*. New York: Psychology Press.
- Clark and Clark. (1977). *Psychology and Language: An Introduction to Psycholinguistics*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovic, Inc.



-
- Kroeger, Paul. (2020, August 13). *Propositional Attitudes*.
[https://human.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Composition/Advanced_Composition/Book%3A_Analyzing_Meaning -
 _An_Introduction_to_Semantics_and_Pragmatics_\(Kroeger\)/12%3A_How_me
 anings_are_composed/12.04%3A_Propositional_attitudes](https://human.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Composition/Advanced_Composition/Book%3A_Analyzing_Meaning_-_An_Introduction_to_Semantics_and_Pragmatics_(Kroeger)/12%3A_How_meanings_are_composed/12.04%3A_Propositional_attitudes)
- Schauer, G.A. (2009). *Interlanguage Pragmatics Development: the Study Abroad Context*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Walenta, M. (2019). *Form-Function Mapping in Content-Based Language Teaching: A Study on Interlanguage Structuring*. Switzerland, AG: Springer