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Vague Language in Cigarette Advertising Tagline in Indonesia

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Abstract

In Indonesia, cigarette is viewed from different perspectives. It is a popular and cultured product hated because of the health threat and bad stigma attached to smokers, especially women and children. In its marketing, cigarette producers used vague language as a strategy with the intention of fooling the public on health threats and the bad stigma attached to the product. However, this concept is a sub-study of pragmatics in the theory of communication cooperation containing violations of maxims. Marketers make use of it to make cigarettes acceptable in society. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate the function of vague language in advertising tagline of cigarettes in Indonesia. The analysis was based on vague language theory, the principle of cooperation, and conversational implicatures with data taken from the cigarette advertisement tagline in the country. The results showed that the use of the concept tends to violate the Maxim of Relevance and Manner with the aim of increasing flexibility, persuasion, provoking consumers, hiding negative values, building identity, and attacking competitors.

Keywords: vague language, smoking advertisement tagline, pragmatics

Lenguaje Vago En El Lema Publicitario De Cigarrillos En Indonesia

En Indonesia, el cigarrillo se ve desde diferentes perspectivas. Es un producto popular y culto odiado por la amenaza para la salud y el mal estigma asociado a los fumadores, especialmente a las mujeres y los niños. En su comercialización, los productores de cigarrillos utilizaron un lenguaje vago como estrategia con la intención de engañar al público sobre las amenazas a la salud y el estigma malo asociado al producto. Sin embargo, este concepto es un subestudio de la pragmática en la teoría de la cooperación en comunicación que contiene violaciones de máximas. Los vendedores lo usan para hacer que los cigarrillos sean aceptables en la sociedad. Por lo tanto, el propósito de este estudio fue investigar la función del lenguaje vago en el eslogan publicitario de los cigarrillos en Indonesia. El análisis se basó en la teoría del lenguaje vago, el principio de cooperación y las implicaciones conversacionales con los datos tomados del lema publicitario de cigarrillos en el país. Los resultados mostraron que el uso del concepto tiende a violar la Máxima Relevancia y la Manera con el objetivo de aumentar la flexibilidad, la persuasión, provocar a los consumidores, ocultar valores negativos, construir identidad y atacar a los competidores.

Palabras clave: lenguaje vago, lema publicitario de fumar, pragmática.

Introduction

Advertising is a media used in introducing and offering certain products to consumers because of its ability to disseminate information to the society in a very limited space and time. Verbal language is, therefore, one of the important elements used in expressing advertisements and increasing the effectiveness of advertising communications. Furthermore, a tagline is a verbal element contained in an advertisement because of the strength of its persuasiveness, which is used in making messages to be delivered by producers more effective.

High consumption power of the Indonesian people has led to a significant variation in the advertising style employed by producers and marketers to maximize the way products and services sold are known and accepted by society.

In addition to competing in quality, producers make taglines as attractive as possible to impress prospective consumers. This is because they convey

tempting messages to make consumers interested in buying products and services they promote such that the more interesting they are, the more likely the product sold and service offered is purchased. Therefore, tagline tends to come with interesting, informative, contextual, provocative and informal languages to increase the popularity and closeness of the product to the society.

In Indonesia, cigarettes are products presenting mixed feelings in society. This is due to the assumption that they are considered capable of giving a sense of calmness, togetherness, and virility, and also have an adverse effect on health, especially the lungs and heart. Furthermore, they are also attached to bad images, especially for women, teenagers, and children. These led the government to make policies ranging from warnings and images of the effects of smoking on cigarette packaging to restrictions on its advertisements such as not being able to show them visually in advertisements. The negative aspects of the product make producers package its advertisement to make it appealing in all circles, one of which is through the use of vague language.

Vagueness is one of the basic characteristics of the language (Channell, 1994) and it is mostly used in advertising. Several researches have been conducted in recent years on vague language, hereinafter referred to as VL. However, those on commercial advertising are relatively less (Wenzhong and Jingyi, 2013). In order to close this gap, this article focused on discussing the use of VL with data in cigarette advertisement taglines in Indonesia and also to explain the application of the concept from a pragmatic perspective (Carter & McCarthy, 2006; Cutting, 2007; Wenzhong and Jingyi, 2013). In accordance with the views of Wenzhong and Jingyi (2013) who assume that Cooperative and Implicative Principles of Conversation from Grice (1975) can be appropriately used to describe the function and purpose of using VL, this study relied on VL theory (Channell, 1994; Carter & McCarthy, 2006; Cutting, 2007; Zhang 2011; Wenzhong and Jingyi, 2013) and pragmatics (Principles of Cooperation and Conversational Implicatures) from Grice (1975).

A successful advertisement has the ability to lead the business operation of a company to success. Therefore, studying the use of vague language in cigarette advertising in Indonesia is a good reference for companies due to its ability to provide an overview of advertising designs that have successfully utilize VL.

Literature

Advertising is the delivery of non-personal information, usually paid and persuasive related to products (goods and services) or ideas by sponsors and disseminated through various media (Bovee & Arens, 1992). However, it can be categorized into two, commercial and non-commercial. Commercial advertising is the promotion of goods, services, or ideas for business with the hope of generating profits. In order to achieve commercial objectives, advertisers strive to attract consumers by triggering their desire to consume.

Language is one of the most important elements of advertising usually used by advertisers to attract attention and provoke potential customers, especially through the use of a tagline. Although language has a central role in conveying information, but there are times people intentionally make it unclear or vague (Channell, 1994; Carter & McCarthy, 2006; Cutting, 2012; Zhang 2011). Vagueness has become the nature of language for several reasons. First, language is arbitrary and based on agreement. Second, its use cannot be separated from the context. Third, there are certain purposes or norms where vagueness should be applied (Cutting, 2015; Zhang 2011; Wenzhong and Jingyi, 2013). Furthermore, advertising language is created for the purpose of attracting attention and directing consumers to products or services offered (Dyer, 1995).

Experts have seen and studied the VL from its definition (Channell, 1994; Carter & McCarthy, 2006; Cutting, 2007; Zhang 2011) to the exploitation of its functions (Channell, 1994; Cutting, 2007; Wenzhong and Jingyi, 2013; Trappes-Lomax, 2007). The concept is seen as being natural to language by all the researchers (Channell, 1994; Cutting, 2007; Wenzhong and Jingyi, 2013). However, there are variations in the perspectives of these scholars on the extent to which a language can be classified as VL and an in-depth discussion has also been conducted on its usage in communication. Moreover, the concept has been defined as a word/phrase that intentionally refers to a person or entity in a non-specific and inappropriate way (Carter & McCarthy, 2006; Cutting, 2015). Semantic explanations provided by Carter and McCarthy (2006) revealed vague words or phrases to contain non-specific things. In agreement with this, Zhang (2011) stated that VL is a linguistic unit, comprising words, phrases, or sentences, without clear meaning. For instance, how many? How tall is her body? How is the beauty? “many,” “high,” and “beautiful” are all examples and their meanings vary with different situations (Channell, 1994; Carter & McCarthy, 2006; Cutting, 2007). Cheng and Warren (2001: 82) agreed to this assertion by stating that VL is always contextual but not easy to solve.

Furthermore, Cheng (2007: 162) argued that VL consists of a set of items that can be identified and interpreted based on a particular context. Listeners will only get a few ways to interpret it correctly with more possibility of failure. Moreover, Cheng and Warren (2001; 2003) emphasized the need to view it differently from implicit and indirect languages. However, some researchers ignore the differences between the three (Cheng and Warren, 2001; 2003). Van Deemter (2010: 95) reported that vagueness or ambiguity is always associated with the meaning and function of language. Ullmann (1972) further associated four factors to the concept including the general character of words; heterogeneous by being context bound; lack of clear boundaries; and the level of closeness with one another (Channell, 2000). Other reasons for vagueness provided by Crystal and Davy (1975) include forgetting the right word to use by a speaker because of memory loss; lack of suitable word; lack of understanding of what is being discussed; and deliberate attempt to maintain an atmosphere for a conversation (Qiao, 2010). In terms of advertising language, Cao and Gao (2007) summarized two general reasons for the emergence of ambiguities or vagueness and they were found to be applied when an accurate description or statement is not possible because of the nature of the product or service; and when special needs such as politeness or imagination must be fulfilled.

VL is often met with negative attitudes because of the misconceptions about its nature and functions (Overstreet and Yule, 1997b). In fact, it is not a shortcoming as people think (Rowland 2007: 94), but an important part of human communication (van Deemter 2010: 93) especially in interpersonal and colloquial discussions (Carter and McCarthy 2006: 202). How well a person can use VL is based on pragmatic competence (Fraser 2010). Channell (1994: 3) said that its use is not a matter of bad or good, but appropriate application. Therefore, Vague language (VL) can be said to be an integral part of our language and plays an important role in communication. However, incorrect assumptions often lead to undesirable VL (Zhang, 2013).

Vague languages are used to meet certain needs (Wenzhong and Jingyi, 2013). It was discovered that the concept has both positive functions such as increasing communication flexibility through politeness, increasing communication persuasion, and ensuring information accuracy and negative ones such as deception and its misleading attribute. VL is usually used to hide the shortcomings or negative values of a particular thing (Cutting, 2012). It can also be applied to maintain the value of politeness and communication relations between speakers and speech partners (Cutting,

2012; Trappes-Lomax, 2007; Drave, 2001). It always provides an opportunity for a speech partner to make known the purpose behind its usage (Cutting, 2012; Carter & McCarthy, 2006; Drave, 2001). In addition, it is commonly used to express doubts about claims or arguments submitted by speakers (Cutting, 2015; Myers, 1996). Cutting (2012) added that VL can be used as a “comfort” function when accuracy is felt not to be contributing much to arguments (Cutting 2012). This is mostly applied when the specification of the information in an argument has the tendency of inviting threats (Cutting 2015). It is used as a form of “self-defense” by a writer or speaker when avoiding accuracy in order to minimize the threat to be faced (Trappes-Lomax, 2007; Cutting 2012). Therefore, messages are intentionally disguised, either to avoid challenges or for protection and VL can be used to increase “strength”, in some cases such as the implicit social attributes of a writer or speaker during arguments (Cutting 2012). Furthermore, the vagueness of information sometimes forces the speech partner or reader to find out more about an author or a speaker. In addition, it can also be used for “disguise” in the sense that a speaker intentionally makes everything nonspecific in order to create an impression of a deeper understanding of a concept more than others despite the ignorance of details (Cutting 2012).

The pieces of literature reviewed show that there are diverse functions of VL based on contexts and cases and this has given researchers the opportunity to explore its use in cigarette advertisements in Indonesia. This is very reasonable considering the condition of the cigarette industry in the country is different from other products. Based on the opinions of Wenzhong and Jingyi (2013) who believe thorough discussion of VL function must be supported by the theory of Cooperative Principles and Conversational Implications of Grice (1975) which proposed to describe how people interact with each other in conversation by considering the implied meaning behind the literal speech. The concept of “implicature” was introduced to show the meaning that was successfully concluded. Furthermore, Grice (1975) made a clear distinction between what is said and what is intended and implied. Several theories such as the Principle of Cooperation were formulated to regulate the production and interpretation of utterances in conversation. The author argued that speakers generally intend to be cooperative in conversation because it usually consists of a series of disconnected and irrational statements. However, at a certain level, the conversation runs smoothly without leaving a mistake and this was called a collaborative effort by Grice (1975).

Grice (1975:45-47) further argued that a reasonable conversation can occur if the participant follows the principle of cooperation which was formulated in four Conversational Maxim of quantity, quality, relevance, manner.

Method

This research was conducted qualitatively and the examples mostly chosen from cigarette advertising on Indonesian television were adopted to analyze the vague language in the cigarette advertisement tagline in the country. Furthermore, the data obtained were analyzed based on VL theory (Channell, 1994; Carter & McCarthy, 2006; Cutting, 2007, 2012, 2015; Zhang 2011; Wenzhong dan Jingyi, 2013), and pragmatics (PK and IP) from Grice (1975). These made it possible to explore the goals of advertisers as well as the functions of vague language in more depth.

Results and Discussion

1. Increasing Flexibility

One of the functions of VL is to maintain an atmosphere of communication (Wenzhong dan Jingyi, 2013). Its use allows the speaker or writer to reduce the possibility of tensions in communication. Therefore, it is used when the message to be delivered is vulnerable to causing conflict. Thus, making it easier for cigarette advertisers to deliver messages in a flexible manner.

(1) A real man, becomes an inspiration. (True-Bentoel Cigarette)

Data (1) is the tagline of Sejati cigarette advertisement produced by Bentoel. This is a positive expression because it does not deviate from the values or norms of society. The ambiguity was found in the relationship between the advertised product and the phrase. Readers find it hard to understand such a phrase because it is difficult to find the relationship between the product advertised and the tagline used. This condition indicates there has been a violation of the Maxim of Relevance.

Another ambiguity observed is the level of semantics such that the phrase “real man” could be interpreted as ‘a real or pure man’ and ‘true man who smoked cigarettes’. Data (1) could also cause conflict or possible rejection by a particular party. For example, a reader can interpret the tagline as a seduction for smokers to inspire others to consume Sejati cigarettes. Fur-

thermore, it can also be interpreted to be a seduction to smokers to inspire non-smokers to become smokers. Messages of this nature are prone to conflicts in the society, especially in Indonesia if conveyed directly and it is the reason vagueness could be observed in the tagline. This agreed with the submission of Wenzhong and Jingyi (2013) that VL could be created to minimize potential conflicts. The use of VL with similar functions can also be seen in the data below.

(2) DJARUM COKLAT, The grace of Indonesia's Nature (Djarum Coklat)

Data (2) uses a lingual unit of "grace" that accommodates the meaning of "the form of God's love for humans". It shows that it is impossible to make straightforward invitations such as "let's smoke Djarum Coklat!" or "smoke Djarum Coklat because this is a gift from God!" because it will increase conflict and opposition from other parties. Therefore, the advertisement tagline in the data (2) appears vaguely to keep the atmosphere of communication by implying that what God has given to humans must not be wasted in its tagline. However, the word "grace" has a meaning culturally bound to Indonesian society and, in general, they believe that ungrateful and ungraceful people would be met with bad days in the future. This shows that data (2) violated the Maxim of Manner.

Increasing persuasion

Cutting (2015) emphasizes that communication sometimes requires vague language. The tools used in communicating may become pale with their roles and expression limited to a certain level to the extent the exchange of words, information or ideas become paralyzed (Xu, 2011).

In an effort to increase persuasion on advertising, advertisers need a vague language (Wenzhong dan Jingyi, 2013) and this is because it can create more space for artistic description (Zhang, 2013). It can play a positive role in increasing language expression through various ways of persuading (Wenzhong dan Jingyi, 2013).

(3) Yang berharga. Dijaga sempurna (Valuable. Perfectly maintained).
(Cigarettes of 234 super premium-Sampoerna)

Advertisers on data (3) utilized VL to increase the persuasive power of their tagline. The message could be interpreted as "something valuable needs to be maintained perfectly". This implies the product never disap-

points consumers in taste quality. However, data (3) does not specifically indicate the object of the conversation and this means the message could be related to anything. This is necessary because of the policy prohibiting the expressive mention of the product. Furthermore, consumers have the opportunity to obtain the message that the products offered are not cheap. Therefore, the message needs to be delivered artistically with a vague in order to make the consumers understand the reason the product is not sold at cheap prices. The use of vagueness to increase persuasive power in data (3) showed maxim of Manner has been neglected. However, the use of VL with similar functionality can also be seen in the data below.

(4) Make Life More Life.

This data also shows how VL is used to increase the persuasive power. The use of “more” lingual units in the advertising tagline of data (4) shows vagueness. Therefore, each reader has a different picture of the lingual unit “more alive”. The message implies each person can improve the quality of life (referring to aesthetic and personal dimensions) by consuming this product. The tagline was founded on the fact that human beings always want more, therefore, the advertisers use the line to persuade. This data was also observed to have violated the Maxim of Manner.

Provoke

The Indonesian government has imposed restrictions on cigarette advertisements and made efforts to reduce the number of smokers in the country. This is not founded only on health and economy, but also on religion, politics, and culture. More so, the debate on the smoking of cigarette is unending and has led to a discourse war between supporters and rejecters. News related to the negative values of cigarettes have always been prominent in Indonesian society and this has created a lot of challenges for advertisers in promoting the product. This led to the integration of VL in advertisements to provoke consumers not to stop smoking and to fight and ignore smoking bans. Therefore, it is used not only to offer products but also to keep smokers unaffected by the opinions of those who reject cigarettes.

(5) Not a criticism. Just do it!!! (Cigarette of Gudang Garam International-Gudang Garam)

Ambiguity in this data can be related to a participant who was attacked.

The interpretation of the phrase “silence the critics” varies by the reader. Some can take it as something that comes from adversity or failure while some may see it as a motivation. However, behind the nuances of motivation, there are other interpretations. If the tagline is seen as an attempt to advertise a certain cigarette product, the interpretations would change. It can be interpreted as an effort to encourage smokers to fight the critics through the use of the phrase “Just do it” or against the criticism by smoking. Furthermore, readers will indirectly be compelled to ignore the warning of the dangers in smoking because the tagline uses the VL to provoke. It is important to point out that the VL used ignored the Maxim of Quality and similar functions can also be seen in the data below.

(6) The weak sometimes, do not want to lose. (A mild)

This data was also meant to provoke readers. The message implies there are weak parties identifiable through the attitude of desiring to always win. However, the vagueness in the data has led to the interpretation that smokers are powerful people, while weak ones are those who reject cigarettes. This can be said to be as a result of the continuous discredit of the product by the repellent parties. Therefore, data (6) indirectly uses VL to provoke readers to ignore these opponents. However, it can be observed that the data also violated the Maxim of Quality because it gives the readers a misconstrued meaning of a situation by calling the caring party weak. Furthermore, it also violated Maxim of Manner because it expresses certain messages in a non-straightforward manner.

Hiding Negative Values

The previous explanation has provided an overview of the condition of cigarettes in Indonesia and the resistance continues to increase. Therefore, this has led advertisers to use VL to hide certain negative values. This was conducted in agreement with the opinion of Cutting (2012) that VL is usually used to hide negative values of certain things. This is necessary because, in general, cigarettes have been judged negatively, therefore it is impossible to make a message about the product in a bright and clear manner.

(7) Never retreat. Turn on your red! (Cigarette of Gudang Garam Merah-Gudang Garam)

Data (7) shows the ambiguity of the relationship between cigarettes and the phrase “never retreat”. One interpretation openly understood by the reader is “don’t stop smoking and keep on smoking your cigarette”. A message like this could not be conveyed clearly and firmly. Therefore, VL is used to hide the effects of the dangers of smoking by presenting the ambiguity in the ad. Prospective customers will implicitly accept the recommendation to continue smoking without any information on the impact of the dangers of smoking. From this explanation, data (7) was found to have ignored Maxim of Manner. The use of VL with similar functions can also be seen in the data below.

(8) Anyway Satisfied. (Bentoel International)

Not different from data (7), it utilized VL to hide the negative value of the advertised product by emphasizing the beneficial effects of smoking. Commercial interests force the advertiser to hide negative values and the VL plays an important role by emphasizing the positive value of the product. However, it can be observed that the data does not refer directly to the positive value, only, in general, the product will give consumers satisfaction. This data violated Maxim of Quantity.

Creating Identity

The use of VL in cigarette advertisements creates a certain identity. The strategy is to create an idealized description of a man with the hope readers will be interested in being the person who is described by the advertisement. Definitely, the implicit meaning of the message would be “to be like that you should consume our cigarettes”. This means VL indirectly seeks to create an identity for existing and potential consumers of the products especially through the presentation of images of how the ideal male character should be and overrides the explicit relationship with the cigarette products. Furthermore, the advertisements bear the disconnected impression between the advertisement and the product being advertised and this type of cigarette advertisement is very dominant in Indonesia.

(9) Being old is certain. Being an adult is a choice. (Cigarette A mild-Sampoerna)

Data (9) shows the use of VL with the function of establishing identity in cigarette advertisements. The data only provides a description of a man's wise steps in life and consumers can indirectly come up with the interpretation that one must smoke a cigarette to act wisely. The continuous showing of the advertisement will establish an identity that 'A mild' is a cigarette for wise men. There is no invitation or seduction to consume products such as advertising in general. Therefore, this indicates there has been a violation of the Maxim of Relevance. The use of VL with similar functions can also be seen in the data below.

(10) Conquer Your Challenge (Surya 12)

In data (10), the identity created through VL in this product is that conquerors consume Surya 12. This will affect the psychology of some men that they need to consume the product in order to conquer their challenges. However, it is important to point out that the use of VL to build an identity in advertising requires high continuity because identity cannot be impressed instantly. This type of advertisement always violates the Maxim of Relevance because it does not present an explicit relationship between the message in the ad and the product advertised.

Attack

There is continuous competition among producers of cigarettes in Indonesia because the country is a big market for them. The competition is mostly evident in their advertisements and that is the reason VL is always integrated to attack the ads of others. This may be necessary because direct and explicit attacks will give a negative impression on the product being advertised. Therefore, it must be conveyed vaguely.

(11) Need more than adventurers to be a man. (Cigarettes of Gudang Garam International-Gudang Garam)

Data (11) shows the use of VL with the function to build identity and simultaneously attack other cigarette products. It provides an ideal picture of a brave man to attract the attention of consumers. Furthermore, it also indicates an attempt to attack another product that used "a man must be an

adventurer and to be an adventurer you need to consume our cigarettes” as its tagline. The attack is given vaguely by implying “we need more than adventurers to say I’m a man”. Analyzing the content and purpose of the ad revealed there is a violation of the Maxim of Relevance in the data. The use of VL with similar functions can also be seen in the data below.

(12) Just brave is not enough. Just exists is not enough. (Cigarettes of Gudang Garam International-Gudang Garam)

Data (12) uses ambiguity to attack advertisements from other products using “men need cigarettes that can make them brave and adventurous”. This data shows an attempt to attack the identity that other cigarette products are trying to build by utilizing VL. The vagueness in this tagline leads the reader to come to the interpretation that “as men, we need something more than that”. This is an indirect attempt to overturn the ideals of identity built by other cigarette products and this was found to be proof of the violation of Maxim of Relevance.

The findings in this study indicate the specificity of the VL function in the cigarette advertisement tagline in Indonesia which is different from what is observed in commercial advertisements such as beauty products, automotive, fashion, food, and others. VL forms a dynamic meaning because it depends on contextualization (Channell, 1994; Carter & McCarthy, 2006; Cutting, 2007; Cheng and Warren, 2001). VL in the Indonesian cigarette advertising tagline has six functions. Three of these including increasing flexibility, increasing persuasion and hiding negative values are generally found in other domains (Channell, 1994; Carter & McCarthy, 2006; Cutting, 2007; Zhang 2011; Wenzhong and Jingyi, 2013; Li, 2017). However, others such as provoking, building identity, and attacking are typical functions possessed by the cigarette advertising tagline in Indonesia with the provoking function opposing those who do not agree with smoking habits in the society.

Furthermore, building an identity is a marketing strategy chosen by cigarette producers to fool the rules that apply to their products. It has indirectly become the most effective strategy to offer products and attract consumer interest. This can be proven from the high frequency of the appearance of cigarette advertisements in Indonesia with this strategy. Finally, the attack function is related to the high level of competition between cigarette producers in the country. In this case, VL in the tagline not only offer products

and attract consumer interest, but also weaken and damage the image of other similar products. However, violation of Maxim of Relevance and Manner is observed to be prevalent in the overall use of VL in the cigarette advertisement tagline in Indonesia.

Conclusion

This research showed the relationship between commercial advertising and language and the uniqueness of obscurity in the language of advertising. Furthermore, the language was not clearly explored because there is no generally accepted definition. In this paper, unclear language is considered as a separate phenomenon which is different from indirect language and ambiguity and the reasons for this was explained based on the opinions of experts.

This article focused on the function of unclear language in the commercial advertising of cigarettes in Indonesia. The findings of the study indicated advertisers use vague language not to offend or violate norms and to comply with regulations set by the government. The functions of VL were found to include increasing communication flexibility, increasing persuasion, provoking, hiding negative values, creating identity, and attacking. Furthermore, based on the pragmatic theory, Cooperative Principles, and Conversational Implications, the use of vague languages tends to violate the Maxim of Relevance and Manner. The research findings showed there are general VL functions found such as increasing flexibility, increasing persuasion, and hiding negative values (Channell, 1994; Carter & McCarthy, 2006; Cutting, 2007; Wenzhong and Jingyi, 2013; Trappes-Lomax, 2007; Drave, 2001). As well as those typically found in cigarette advertisements in Indonesia such as provoking, creating identity, and attacking. Moreover, new functions indicated VL function to be dependent on context.

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