

# **A CULTURE REPRESENTED BY THE WORDS “WHITE AND WHITENING” ON HAND AND BODY LOTION PRODUCT’S LABEL**

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## **ABSTRAK**

*Penelitian ini menganalisa kata ‘white’ dan ‘whitening’ pada label produk hand and body lotion yang mengarah pada sebuah kultur dalam bentuk produk menggunakan pendekatan Antropologi Linguistik. Penelitian ini dilakukan karena peneliti melihat bahwa produk hand and body lotion di Indonesia secara linguistik merupakan sebuah kultur orang Indonesia, khususnya wanita sebagai penggunanya. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah menunjukkan budaya wanita Indonesia yang dibentuk oleh produsen hand and body lotion lewat penggunaan kata ‘white’ dan ‘whitening’ di label. Peneliti menggunakan Metode Wawancara Terbuka dari Creswell (2010:26) untuk mengumpulkan respon dari responden. Untuk mengumpulkan kata ‘white’ dan ‘whitening’, peneliti menggunakan Metode Teknik Catat dari Creswell (2010:272) dan Metode Simak Bebas Libat Cakap dari Liu dan Matlis (2010). Untuk menganalisa data, penulis menggunakan Theory of Culture as a System of Mediation dari Duranti (1997:40-41). Peneliti menemukan bahwa kata ‘white’ dan ‘whitening’ mempunyai makna yang mengarah pada suatu konsep yang diinginkan oleh para wanita Indonesia. Pada akhirnya, peneliti menyimpulkan bahwa salah satu karakteristik cantik yang terbentuk oleh wanita Indonesia adalah dengan memiliki warna kulit putih atau cerah.*

*Kata kunci: Antropologi Linguistik, ‘white’ dan ‘whitening’, hand and body lotion, Duranti, Theory of Culture as a System of Mediation, pengguna, produsen.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Language is a tool that people use for communication. By using language, someone conveys their thoughts, feelings, desires and emotional states. Some say that what we

think is influenced by our language so that our speech influences our ways of thinking as well. However, anthropologists believe that someone's speech is influenced by their culture to which society they belong because culture lives in people's thoughts.

Linguistic Anthropology is a study about the relation between language and culture. Duranti (1997:2) states that Linguistic Anthropology is a science studying language as culture and speaking as a cultural practice. By means of this study, the writer is interested in writing a research project about the words 'white' and 'whitening' on one of cosmetic products, that is, hand and body lotion used by Indonesian women.

The object of the study in this paper is the words 'white' and 'whitening' on the labels of hand and body lotion product. Based on linguistic anthropology approach, the writer analyzes the collected data to draw a conclusion of the way Indonesian women think of the usage of hand and body lotion for their skin is that they believe it can whiten or brighten their skin (as reflected in the words 'white' and 'whitening' on the labels of hand and body lotion product and the questionnaire). In this study, the writer tried to answer the following question, "What kind of cultural meaning or values do the words 'white' and 'whitening' represent?". The purpose of the study is to explain the way of text producer used the words 'white' and 'whitening' to represent cultural values.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

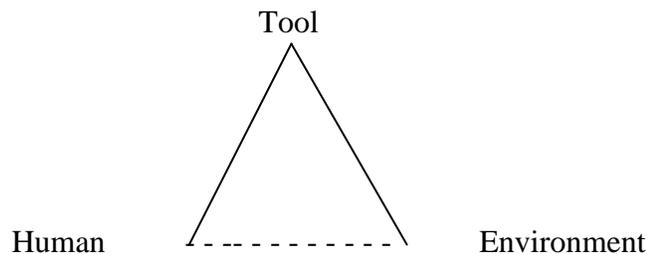
This research belongs to a qualitative descriptive research as the analyzed data on this research are the words 'white' and 'whitening' found on 13 (thirteen) products' labels from 3 (three) different hand and body lotion brands in Indonesia. It is a kind of a library research since the data are in the form of a written document. The writer uses two kinds of data, those are, primary data and secondary data.

The primary data are the words 'white' and 'whitening' on the hand and body lotion product's label as the main data to be analyzed. Meanwhile, the secondary data are the respondent' answers from the interview about their thought of those words and they are taken in order to support the main data. In this paper, the primary data are collected from official websites of 'Citra', 'Nivea', and 'Vaseline' hand and body lotion products as the primary data sources. They are [www.nivea.co.id](http://www.nivea.co.id), [www.vaseline.co.id](http://www.vaseline.co.id), and [www.rumahcantikcitra.co.id](http://www.rumahcantikcitra.co.id). The writer collects 5 (five) labels of 'Citra' hand and body lotion products, 3 (three) labels of 'Nivea' hand and body lotion products, and 5 (five) labels of 'Vaseline' hand and body lotion products. To document the data, the writer uses Note-Taking Technique from Creswell (2010:272), Non-Participatory Observation Method from Liu and Maitlis (2010). To support the primary data, the writer collects the secondary data by using Open-ended Questions (questionnaire) from Creswell (2010:26).

In analyzing the data, the writer uses Theory of Culture as a System of Mediation from Duranti (1997:40-41). In addition, the writer also uses Semantics and Pragmatics approaches in analyzing the words ‘white’ and ‘whitening’ in hand and body lotion products’ labels as the data in this paper. Semantics is a study about meaning while Pragmatics is a study about meaning in context. Both study about sentence meaning, but Pragmatics is a science about sentence meaning within its context.

### **THEORY OF CULTURE AS A SYSTEM OF MEDIATION**

In analyzing the data, the writer used Theory of Culture as a System of Mediation proposed by Duranti (1997:40-41). Duranti (1997:40) states that any tools that humans use on a purpose, that tools have become culture to them as the users. Duranti (1997:39) explained that the mediational objects or tools can be anything that is used by human to do something within their environment. For example, a fork is a mediational object between human and their food.



**Figure 1.2. Tools as a mediating alternative between humans and the environment (Duranti, 1997:40)**

In Figure 1.2, the relation between the straight and the intermittent line is an alternative one. The straight line that represents mediated relationship is an alternative to the intermittent line that represents the unmediated relationship with the environment. Within this view, culture (tool that is used on purpose) includes material objects such as the umbrella and ideational objects such as belief systems and linguistic codes (Duranti, 1997:40). Thus, Duranti (1997:40-41) concludes that both material and ideational structures are instruments through which humans mediate their relationship with the world.

## **A CULTURE REPRESENTED BY THE WORDS “WHITE AND WHITENING” ON HAND AND BODY LOTION PRODUCT’S LABEL**

The writer used the Theory of Culture as a System of Mediation to describe how the words ‘white’ and ‘whitening’ become ‘culture’ to the lotion users. Those words are ‘tangible’ culture because they are used in the labels of hand and body lotion products by the producers. This phenomenon shows us that the producers have intention to persuade the text receiver about the beauty that ‘white’ skin is appealing for Indonesian women. In addition, those words are also ‘intangible’ culture because they influence the thought of the lotions’ users and they become the belief system of the users that by using them, the

users' skin can be 'white'. The users may think that 'white' skin is appealing is match to the producers' intention in using the words 'white' and 'whitening' in the labels of hand and body lotion products.

#### **4.1 Cultural Meanings of the Words 'White' and 'Whitening' on Hand and Body Lotion Product in Indonesia (Duranti, 1997:40-41)**

The words 'white' and 'whitening' are used as the labels of hand and body lotion products certainly indicate that the producers have intention to set a thought that 'white' skin is appealing and this will be proven by the questionnaire in this paper.

The writer analyzes that the words 'white' and 'whitening' in 'Citra' hand and body lotion product' labels also have meaning in Semantics and Pragmatics. In Semantics, these are the meaning of the words in labels of 'Citra': (1) 'Lasting' means 'continuing a long while'; (2) 'Pearly' means 'having the shiny, white color of pearls'; (3) 'Night' means 'part of the day when there is no sunlight'; (4) 'Spotless' means 'having no spot'; (5) 'Advanced' means 'being beyond others in progress or ideas'. Therefore, the words 'Lasting', 'Pearly', 'Night', 'Spotless', and 'Advanced' that follows the words 'white' and 'whitening' in 'Citra' hand and body lotion product can be pragmatically concluded that 'Citra' persuades the text receivers to use its products because they are lasting in skin and can give skin full coverage of lotion that is already advanced even when it is used in the night.

The writer also analyzes that the words 'white' in 'Nivea' hand and body lotion product' labels also have meaning in Pragmatics. 'Nivea' relates the 'UV' and 'Night' to 'whitening'. The writer concluded that pragmatically, producer of 'Nivea' correlate that in any condition, our skin can be whitening if we apply the 'Nivea' hand and body lotion products.

Conversely, the producer of 'Vaseline' hand and body lotion product uses the word 'white' following the word 'healthy' which semantically means 'the condition of being well or free from disease'. 'Nivea' also uses the words 'UV', 'Fair', 'SPF', 'Perfect' and 'Serum'. Semantically, these words: (1) 'UV' means ultraviolet; (2) 'Fair' means not dark; (3) 'SPF' means sun protection factor; (4) 'Perfect' means having all the qualities you want in something; (5) 'Serum' means 'the watery part of something'. The writer concluded that 'Nivea' pragmatically persuades the text receivers that its products give not only 'white' or bright skin, but also health to the users' skin.

According to the Theory of Culture as a System of mediation by Duranti (1997:40), people are always mediated so that they create a tool in order to fulfill their needs. For the example, since people need to keep their body dry, they use an umbrella when it is raining in order to prevent their body from wet (Duranti, 1997:40). Therefore, the words 'white' and 'whitening' on hand and body lotion products' labels are used by the producers in order to fulfill the needs of lotions' users, that is, to have 'white' or bright skin.

Culture can be tangible such as umbrella, or intangible such as belief system (Duranti, 1997:41). Belief system is a set of beliefs that people use in order to survive in this world (Domenech and Selva, 2013:1). The responses of respondents who have been continuously using hand and body lotion product reveal that the respondents always use hand and body lotion because they believe in what hand and body lotion can give to their skin. The users are sure if they use hand and body lotion continuously, their skin will be ‘coated’ (covered from or avoided of the bad impact of sunlight) so that their skin will be brighter or will not get tanned. Based on the data of this research, the writer concluded that the users of hand and body lotion product want to prevent their skin from getting darkened. The writer has asked 3 (three) respondents who are continuously using this product to lighten their skin as they think that lighter skin is appealing. The questionnaire will be included in Appendices.

## **CONCLUSION**

There are 9 (nine) words of ‘white’ and 4 (four) words of ‘whitening’ found on the label of three hand and body lotion brands that are analyzed using the Theory of Culture as a System of Mediation (Duranti, 1997:40-41). The result shows that those words represent culture in Indonesia as they have a close correlation with Indonesian environment (climate) as a country which is located on equator which gets high or direct exposure of sunlight that can darken humans’ skin colour.

In addition to those words' analyses, there are 3 (three) respondents who continuously use the product as they believe that it can make their skin whiter or brighter. Their reason of using the product is also analyzed by using the Theory of Culture as a System of Mediation (Duranti, 1997:40). The result shows the belief system of the users of hand and body lotion product, that is, a belief that the product which are labeled with the words 'white' and 'whitening' are capable of covering the users' skin from sunlight exposure that may darken their skin colour so that they keep using hand and body lotion product. Moreover, they also believe that the product is able to lighten their skin.

In conclusion, the same words 'white' and 'whitening' on the label of hand and body lotion have been 'a culture' for Indonesian women because those words are found in the labels of hand and body lotion products. In addition, they also become belief system of the users of hand and body lotion products based on the analyses using the Theory of Culture as a System of Mediation (Duranti, 1997:40-41). Therefore, the producers of hand and body lotion products are successful in persuading the users or the text receiver to use the lotion on the same purpose as the producers claim through the words 'white' and 'whitening' in the labels of hand and body lotion products.

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