Connotative and Denotative Meaning in Indonesian Milk Slogans: A Semantic Study Based on Roland Barthes Theory

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Abstract

This study explores the denotative and connotative meanings found in Indonesian milk product slogans by using Roland Barthes' theory of semiotics. The purpose of this research is to understand how language in advertisements can shape consumer perception through hidden and symbolic messages. This research uses a descriptive qualitative method. Ten popular milk slogans in Indonesia were selected as the data source. The analysis shows that each slogan carries a denotative meaning (the literal or direct meaning) and a connotative meaning (the symbolic or emotional meaning) related to health, strength, intelligence, or family values. These meanings influence how people see and respond to the product. This study shows that advertising language is rich in meaning, it communicates not only facts, but also emotions and cultural messages.

Keywords: Barthes, connotation, denotation, semantics, slogans.

INTRODUCTION

In the world of advertising, language plays an important role in influencing people's perceptions, emotions, and purchasing decisions. Advertising language is not only used to provide information about products but also to create attractive images and emotional connections with consumers. Through carefully selected words and expressions, advertisers attempt to persuade audiences and build positive impressions about their products. One of the most effective tools used in advertising is the slogan.

A slogan is a short and memorable phrase designed to promote a product, service, or idea. Although slogans are usually brief, they often contain deeper meanings beyond their literal expressions. Effective slogans help consumers remember products and associate them with positive values. In milk advertisements, slogans are frequently related to children's growth, intelligence, health, happiness, and family relationships. Therefore, slogans function not only as marketing tools but also as carriers of social and cultural messages.

In Indonesia, milk advertisements commonly target parents and children by emphasizing the importance of nutrition for growth and development. Many slogans portray ideal children as healthy, intelligent, active, confident, and successful. Through these representations, milk advertisements construct particular images of childhood and parenting. As a result, the language used in slogans can influence consumer perceptions regarding health, family values, and lifestyle choices.

Semantics is a branch of linguistics that studies meaning in language. According to Leech (1981), meaning can be analyzed through different dimensions that help explain how language conveys messages and ideas. Similarly, Yule (2020) states that semantic analysis enables researchers to understand how words and expressions communicate information, emotions, and social values. In advertising, meanings are often communicated not only directly but also symbolically.

Roland Barthes (1972) proposed that signs operate at two levels of meaning: denotation and connotation. Denotation refers to the literal and direct meaning of a sign, while connotation refers to the emotional, symbolic, and cultural meanings associated with it. Through connotation, advertisements can communicate values and ideologies that go beyond the literal meaning of words.

Several previous studies have examined language in milk advertisements. Aqil (2024) found that milk advertisements frequently contain implicit meanings that strengthen persuasive communication and attract consumers. Likewise, Gunawan et al. (2021) reported that figurative language such as metaphor, repetition, and hyperbole is commonly used in children's milk advertisements to create memorable and persuasive messages. These studies demonstrate that advertising language contains multiple layers of meaning that contribute to the effectiveness of promotional communication.

However, limited studies specifically focus on the denotative and connotative meanings of Indonesian milk slogans using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the denotative and connotative meanings found in Indonesian milk slogans and to explore how these meanings influence consumer perceptions. In addition to its contribution to semantic studies, this research is also relevant to language education. Understanding denotative and connotative meanings can help students develop critical language awareness when interpreting advertisements, media texts, and other forms of communication. Through the analysis of slogans, students can learn how language is used not only to convey information but also to express cultural values and persuasive messages. Therefore, this study may contribute to the teaching of semantics, discourse analysis, and media literacy in English language education. The research question of this study is: How do denotative and connotative meanings operate in Indonesian milk slogans?

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design. Qualitative research is appropriate for this study because it focuses on interpreting meanings and understanding how language functions in particular contexts. The purpose of this research is to examine the denotative and connotative meanings embedded in Indonesian milk slogans based on Roland Barthes' semiotic theory.

The data consisted of ten popular milk slogans collected from Indonesian milk advertisements. The slogans were obtained from various sources, including television commercials, YouTube advertisements, social media promotional content, and product packaging. The selected slogans represent well-known milk brands commonly consumed in Indonesia, such as Dancow, SGM, Ultra Milk, Frisian Flag, Zee, Bear Brand, Bebelac, Lactamil, HiLo, and Indomilk.

The data were collected using observation and note-taking techniques. First, the researcher observed milk advertisements from different media platforms. Second, the slogans were identified and recorded. Third, the slogans were classified according to their respective brands. After the data collection process was completed, the slogans were analyzed using Roland Barthes' concepts of denotation and connotation.

The analysis was conducted in several stages. First, the denotative meaning of each slogan was identified by examining its literal meaning. Second, the connotative meaning was analyzed by exploring the emotional, symbolic, and cultural meanings associated with the slogan. Finally, the findings were interpreted to understand how the slogans contribute to shaping consumer perceptions regarding health, intelligence, growth, family values, and lifestyle.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings and discussion of the research about denotative and connotative meanings in Indonesian milk slogans. The data were analyzed using Roland Barthes' theory of semiotics, especially the concepts of denotation and connotation. Denotative meaning refers to the direct or literal meaning of a slogan, while connotative meaning refers to the emotional, cultural, or symbolic meaning behind the words.

We selected ten popular milk slogans from Indonesian advertisements. Each slogan was analyzed carefully to identify how language is used to attract consumers and create certain impressions. In many advertisements, slogans are not only used to introduce products, but also to build emotional connections with the audience. Milk advertisements especially focus on themes such as children's growth, intelligence, health, family love, and success.

The findings show that milk slogans contain hidden meanings that influence how consumers think about the products. Through simple and memorable language, companies try to create positive images about their brands. To make the analysis clearer and easier to understand, the findings are presented in the table below.

NO	Product	Slogan	Denotative Meaning	Connotative Meaning

1.	Dancow	*"Aku dan Kau Suka Dancow"*	I and you like Dancow milk.	Builds emotional closeness and love between parents and children.
2.	SGM	*"Susu untuk Generasi Maju"*	SGM is milk for the future generation.	Drinking SGM makes a child smart, modern, and ready to face the future.
3.	Indomilk	*"Tumbuh Itu Keren"*	Growing up is cool or fun.	Shows growth as stylish and modern; creates pride for both child and parents.
4.	Frisian Flag	*"Nutrisi Tepat Untuk Anak Hebat"*	This milk gives the right nutrition for children.	Only "great kids" come from this milk – builds ideal parenting standards.
5.	Ultra Milk	*"Energi Pagi dari Susu Murni"*	Pure milk gives energy in the morning.	Symbol of a healthy, productive morning and active lifestyle.
6.	Zee	*"Tinggi, Tangguh, Tanggap"*	Kids who drink Zee can be tall, strong, and smart.	Builds the image of a perfect child, strong physically and mentally.
7.	Bear Brand	*"Bukan Sekadar Susu"*	This milk is more than ordinary milk.	Gives the product a premium image, almost like healing or adult wellness support.
8.	Bebelac	*"Aku Anak Hebat, Aku Pilih Bebelac"*	Great kids choose Bebelac.	Links milk choice with intelligence and independence in children.
9.	Lactamil	*"Cinta Bunda, Untuk Tumbuh Kembang Optimal"*	A mother gives the best nutrition through this milk.	Milk becomes a symbol of mother's love and care, raising the emotional value.
10.	HiLo	*"Tumbuh tuh ke Atas, Bukan Kesamping"*	This milk helps children grow taller, not wider.	Promotes the idea of an ideal body (tall, not fat) through smart and healthy choices.

From an educational perspective, the findings highlight the importance of teaching students to critically examine language used in advertisements. Slogans may appear simple, but they often contain multiple layers of meaning that reflect cultural values, social expectations, and persuasive intentions. By analyzing denotative and connotative meanings, students can improve their critical thinking skills and become more aware of how language influences perception. Consequently, the findings of this study can serve as useful learning materials in semantics, discourse analysis, and media literacy courses, particularly for students of English language education.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that Indonesian milk slogans contain both denotative and connotative meanings. The denotative meanings provide direct information about the benefits of milk products, such as nutrition, growth, health, and energy. Meanwhile, the connotative meanings communicate broader messages related to intelligence, confidence, success, family affection, and ideal childhood development.

The analysis demonstrates that milk slogans are carefully designed to influence consumer perceptions through emotional and symbolic messages. By connecting milk consumption with positive social values, advertisers create persuasive communication that strengthens consumers' trust in the products.

Furthermore, the findings support Roland Barthes' theory that signs operate on multiple levels of meaning. Milk slogans not only function as promotional tools but also reflect cultural beliefs and social expectations within Indonesian society. Future studies may explore a larger number of advertising slogans or compare slogans from different product categories in order to gain a broader understanding of meaning construction in advertising language.

Furthermore, this study provides educational implications for English language learning. The analysis of denotative and connotative meanings can be used to enhance students' understanding of semantics and develop critical language awareness. The findings may also serve as a reference for teaching media literacy, helping students evaluate how language is used persuasively in advertisements and other forms of public communication.

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