

A SEMIOTIC STUDY OF ONE READY-TO-DRINK TEA BILLBOARD ADVERTISEMENT IN JAKARTA

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Received: 25th July 2016/ Revised: 4th August 2016/ Accepted: 7th April 2017

How to Cite: da Silva, A. M. (2017). A Semiotic Study of One Ready-To-Drink Tea Billboard Advertisement in Jakarta. *Lingua Cultura*, 10(2). 11(2), 73-77. <http://dx.doi.org/10.21512/lc.v11i2.1510>

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to delve into the linguistic and non-linguistic aspects of a pioneer brand of bottled green tea in the Indonesian market. Four main aspects of the Semiotics study, namely the represented participants, modality, composition, and interactive participants were used to analyze the advertisement. The data for this research was a billboard of Nü Green Tea that was placed in Jl. Kasablanka Raya in South Jakarta. The findings show that the interplay between the non-human object, play of colors, composition, and language choice has been designed carefully in order to boost the targeted audience's attention to the product.

Keywords: semiotic, advertisement, ready-to-drink tea

INTRODUCTION

Within the past few years, there has been an increasing amount of bottled drink or ready-to-drink products in Indonesia (Poeradisastira, 2011). These ready-to-drink products consist of mineral water, carbonated water, tea, and other kinds of drink. Bottled mineral water has been predominant. Within the period of 2004 to 2015 the demand for ready-to-drink water has always been higher in comparison to the other kinds of bottled drink, such as tea and carbonated water. Yet, the variety of carbonated water and tea keeps growing.

In the past, the well-known bottled drink manufacturers in Indonesia such as PT SinarSosro, Orangtua Group, and PT Tirta Investama started their business with only one product, e.g., tea, healthy drink, and water, respectively, which became their signature for decades. In line with the development of technology, the companies have extended their product. SinarSosro, known for its first brand Teh Botol Sosro since 1940, expanded their product into Fruit Tea in 1997 and other products, e.g., fruit juice and mineral water in the following years (PT Sinar Sosro, n.d.). Orangtua Group (hereafter referred to as OT), which was founded in 1948, began their first business with the traditional healthy drink. In 2004, OT developed their product into ready-to-drink tea and other healthy drinks (Orangtua Grup, n.d.). PT Golden Mississippi pioneered the packaged water in 1973. For many years, they

have dominated the market for bottled mineral water, and they eventually launched flavored water in 2005 (PT Tirta Investama, 2011).

Looking at the growing number of a variety of bottled drink marketed in Indonesia, one can see a potential greater demand of this product (Poeradisastira, 2011). Nevertheless, there seems to be a small number of researches on the ads of bottled drink, particularly the billboard ads, from the Semiotic point of view. The present study intends to add the number of literature in the field mentioned above. The goal of the research is to explore one billboard advertisement of one pioneer product of bottled ready-to-drink tea from the Semiotic viewpoint. The focus of the study is the linguistic and non-linguistic characteristics of a billboard ad of Nü Green Tea.

Billboard ads can be analyzed from the Semiotic viewpoint. Thus, the center of attention is the meaning conveyed by the sign authors to the targeted audience through the advertisements (Scollon & Scollon, 2003). Picture, text, color, and their placement in the billboards do not carry their meaning per se; the meaning is created by the authors, and it needs to be decoded by an audience. Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) have argued that the primary components of the semiotic system include represented participants, modality, composition, and interactive participants. Participants indicate components that are shown in the sign, in this case, a billboard, which may include a picture of an individual, inscription, image, emblem, diagram, and so on. The

participants are not loose objects, their presence in a sign carry either a narrative meaning or a conceptual meaning.

The former suggests an explicit and concrete act while the latter an intangible act of the participants that should be connected by a trajectory. Modality denotes the truth value or credibility of (linguistically realized) statements about the world (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Modality does not have to be manifested merely in words but also in colors (Brierley, 1995) and their components such as gradation, intensity, and symbolism. Natural color is said to have the greatest modality. With regard to color, Brierley (1995) has pointed out that different color represents different meaning. For example, unlike the orange, blue does not represent warmth. Composition denotes the place of text and picture in the advertisement. Different position signals different sense. Top position signifies something perfect, but there is a difference between the top left and right spots. Meanwhile, the bottom area indicates actuality, with different sense between the left and right location too. While top position denotes an ideal value, the bottom position signifies an actuality. As said, there is also a difference between the left and right positions. The left implies something given whereas the right is for something novel. Interactive participants include the relationship between the sign authors or creators and the subjects placed in the sign, between the subjects in the sign, and between the subjects in the sign and the audience of the sign (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). The interactive participants may be more or less equal to the framing device used in an advertisement. A framing device is a tool to direct the audience as well as to control their perception toward the meaning created by the advertisers through the presentation of the image, picture, photo, chart, or graph (Brierley, 1995).

In the multimodal discourse study on the printed advertisement of Elizabeth Arden's Intervene (a beauty product for women), Nugroho (2009) has found that the interaction between the participant (the brand ambassador) in the printed advertisement and the background of the image reveal a good image of the brand. Furthermore, the connection between the major and minor description about the brand or product matches to the target audience's experience on life and aging. The advertisement is successful in creating a relationship between the image and the lexical items chosen that may encourage the major target audience to purchase the product.

The language of advertisements may be composed of several characteristics (Brierley, 1995). First, the tone is persuasive. Its purpose is to sell the product or service advertised as well as to build the audience's trust of the brand. Therefore, adjectives are the most preferable type of word used. Second, the content is usually uncomplicated for the audience to be able to read and understand the message of the advertisement in a short time, less than two seconds. Hence, short and straightforward sentences and compounds are frequently employed. Third, the language used should be able to attract the attention of the audience. Language play and creativity such as turning verbs into adjectives and creating effective compounds are often used. Other strategies include repetition of words, sounds, and images along with parallelism, paradox, omission, and ambiguity.

Similarly, Gibbons (2005) has pointed out that advertisements use brief idioms, clichés, and familiar expressions. Although the words selected are short and easy to understand, their occurrence with images may lead to a complex message beyond the audience's expectation. Interestingly, the presence of lexical items with images in

advertisements has made it possible to decode the images with words. Language in the advertisement may be used extraordinarily in order to create a powerful effect. Wheeler (2013) has highlighted the importance of language in creating a brand identity. She has noted that advertisements should use simple but persuasive and fundamental words. Most importantly, the audience should be able to perceive the message conveyed by the advertisements.

Within non-English speaking countries, English is used in advertisements for several reasons (Martin, 2006). First, English is the lingua franca of multinational companies that operate across countries. Second, English is a tool to direct the audience to particular values, experiences or things that characterize the product or brand sold. Third, English facilitates the spread of the culture of the non-English speakers. Fourth, English acts as a device to help the audience to recollect the brand. Finally, English is a symbol of prestige which is why it is preferable for commercial public signs (Lai, 2013; Lanza & Woldemariam, 2014; Manan, David, Dumanig, & Naqebullah, 2015; Taylor, Franke, & Bang, 2006; Torkington, 2009). Studies have also proved that English has been used to advertise expensive or non-basic commodities (da Silva, 2014; Krishna & Ahluwalia, 2010; Lawrence, 2012). Hence, the use of English does not have to be related to the English literacy of the advertisement readership. Rather, English is used as what the language symbolizes, namely universality, excellence, and trend of the youth (Hsu, 2008).

The youth language in Indonesian context may also signify to the use of colloquial Jakartan Indonesian dialect (Sneddon, 2006). The dialect is used for informal situations, commonly between young Indonesian speakers. Some of the characteristics of the colloquial forms are the omission of the initial *s* in some words such as *sama* (the same) and *sudah* (already). Other characteristics include the use of *entar* instead of *nanti* (later), *kenapa* instead of *mengapa* (why), or *pas* instead of *ketika* (while) as well as the use of vowel schwa /ə/ to replace the vowel /a/.

METHODS

The data for this research is a billboard of Nü Green Tea that is placed in Jl. Kasablanka Raya in South Jakarta. The road connects the residential areas to the business center in South Jakarta. It is one of the main streets in South Jakarta with the most severe traffic during the rush hour every day. The picture on the billboard is taken in May 2014. Billboard has been considered as an effective and noticeable advertising medium, especially when the advertiser intends to introduce a new product (Taylor, Franke, & Bang, 2006). The advertisement of ready-to-drink tea is selected because of the increasing number of its brands and flavors due to technology innovation (Poeradisastira, 2011). Nü Green Tea's billboard is chosen because the brand pioneered ready-to-drink green tea with royal jasmine flavor (Sanusi, 2014).

The data is analyzed by using Kress & van Leeuwen's (2006) four main components of the semiotic system, i.e., represented participants, modality, composition, and interactive participants. Another model used is Nugroho's (2009) generic structure of the visual components. The variables used are language, inscription, picture, and color. In addition, to specifically analyze the language in use, the research adopts characteristics of advertisement language by Brierley (1995), the symbolic use of English in advertisements by Hsu (2008) and Martin (2006) as well as the use of Indonesian on billboard ads by da Silva (2014).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Nü Green Tea is a brand from PT ABC President Indonesia. The product is a ready-to-drink green tea that was launched in 2005. The company pioneered the production of ready-to-drink green tea (PT. ABC President Indonesia, 2016). Its main target market is youth aged between 16 to 25 years old who also care about their lifestyle (Marketeers Editor, 2015). The Nü Green Tea billboard (Figure 1) does not present any individuals. Rather, the advertisement shows a picture of a 550ml-bottle of Nü Green Tea, which becomes the Locus of attention of the billboard advertisement.



Figure 1 The Billboard of Nü Green Tea

Figure 2 shows the picture of Nü Green Tea bottle which is placed in the center of the advertisement. However, the absence of human participants neither reduces nor eliminates the message of the advertisement. The decision of not using human participants in the billboard advertisement may be related to the intention to introduce the new product to the market (Marketeers Editor, 2015). The bottle of Nü Green Tea is the focus of the advertisement, which is expected to be able to direct the viewers' attention to the bottle, the brand, and the content, including the flavor and the image created about the brand.



Figure 2 The Locus of Attention: Image

There are several words printed on the bottle. The word Nü, which is equal to new, is printed in red with the white background using the biggest font of all the other words. Red may suggest power while white honesty and goodness. The phrase green tea is written in italics using smaller font below Nü. The use of the italicized instead of non-italicized fonts can be viewed as a way to highlight that the product is not an ordinary black tea. Instead, it is a green tea which offers several important benefits for human health (Dewi, 2015). The color dark green is used for green tea, which may suggest an analogy to the color of the green tea leaves or nature. Next, the Indonesian translation for green tea, *Minuman Teh Hijau*, is put below the phrase green tea. Afterwards, the words Royal Jasmine which refer to the flavor of the tea is put below *minuman teh hijau* (the translation of green tea). The additional information put below royal jasmine, *dengan gula batu*, notifies that the tea uses lump sugar. The information *dengan gula batu* is written in white with the purple background. White may suggest honesty and purple luxury (Brierley, 1995). Luxury may represent the use of lump sugar which is generally more expensive than granular sugar in Indonesia. Each group of the word(s): (1) Nü, (2) green tea, (3) royal jasmine, and (4) *dengan gula batu*, uses different font theme. This may indicate the distinctive features of the product in comparison to other similar products. At the bottom part of the bottle, lies a picture of four pieces of tea leaves and seven buds of jasmine. Below the picture is the Indonesian translation of green tea, namely *teh hijau* and royal jasmine, namely *melati* along with another additional information about the tea, i.e., *dari daun teh hijau pilihan*.

Figure 3 shows the major tagline is in Jakartan Indonesian (Sneddon, 2006), i.e., *cara seger ngilangin haus bandel* (the fresh way to satisfy an unquenchable thirst). The words *cara seger ngilangin* (the 'fresh way' to satisfy . . .) are printed in dark green above *haus bandel* (. . . an unquenchable thirst), which is printed in yellow. The upper part uses the smaller font than the lower part. It appears that the purpose of using the bigger font for *haus bandel* next to the picture of the bottle is to direct the audience to think that consuming a bottle of Nü Green Tea would satisfy their unquenchable thirst. The use of Jakartan Indonesian may be attributed to the target audience, the youths.



Figure 4 The Composition of Nü Green Tea Ads

The background color of the billboard (the Complement of Locus of Attention) is a gradation of green, yellow, white, and brown. Green may symbolize nature, yellow warmth, white goodness, and brown the soil or earth (Brierley, 1995). Green may also suggest the brand name, *green (tea)*. The color green is placed on top of the billboard, which is followed by the gradation of yellow and green as well as the gradation of white to brown at the bottom part of the billboard. The sense of naturalness, safety, and classy seem to be strongly highlighted and become their product image.

Finally, the interactive participants signal three kinds of connections: (1) the connection between the Nü Green Tea authors, the advertisement creators, and the items (image of the bottle, the brand name, the product information and inscription on the bottle and on the ads, the taglines, and color) that are placed in the advertisement. (2) The connection between the picture of the bottle, the writing, the background color, the font size, and the color. (3) The connection between the Nü Green Tea advertisement and the targeted audience. It is noted that the relationship between the brand authors, advertisement creators, and the targeted readership is reflected in the objects and script put on the billboard (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

The Nü Green Tea billboard advertisement put the entity, i.e., the bottle and major tag line, as the center of attention. The brand is written in English, and the selling information about the product (that it uses lump sugar) is written in Indonesian. However, Indonesian is also used to translate the brand (*minuman teh hijau* for green tea) and to give important information about the product (*teh hijau melati dari daun teh hijau pilihan* for royal jasmine green tea from selected green tea leaves). The use of English language for the brand may be associated with the prestigious status of English for commercial purposes (da Silva, 2014; Hsu, 2008; Martin, 2006). The use of English, however, may not necessarily indicate that the major target readership is foreigners or English-speaking audience. The use of Indonesian and Jakartan Indonesian, particularly exemplified by the use of the modified new into Nü together with the Jakartan Indonesian adjectives *seger* and *bandel*. It may imply that the primary target audience is the youth who can afford the lavishness and want to be part of the new generation as the brand is new and pioneer in its field.

In that regard, the minor tagline *makes you Nü* provides two senses. First, Nü which can be interpreted as new is the opposite of old. Thus, new may be interpreted as young. Second, the brand Nü (Green Tea) connotes a natural, healthy, and luxurious product for young people. The use of light green, yellow, white, and brown for the words may be identical with playfulness, warmth, goodness, and brightness, which can represent the youth. Those colors may also characterize the product as natural, healthy, and good. It seems that the image of the brand or product is new, natural, harmless, and luxurious.

CONCLUSIONS

Applying the Semiotic approach, the study has revealed several features of a Nü Green Tea billboard advertisement. The first element is the picture of the bottle with the brand, product information, and colors printed on the bottle with the major tagline next to it. The second element is the brand and product information, tag, and minor tagline positioned on the top and bottom of the billboard.

The third element is the play of colors. The final element is the use of both formal and colloquial Indonesian for the taglines and product information, and English for the brand. The interaction of all the elements is aimed at encouraging the main target readership, i.e., young people, to purchase the product.

Nevertheless, the current research only focuses on one product. Further research may be extended to a comparison of billboard advertisements of ready-to-drink tea brands and other ready-to-drink products to see how linguistic and non-linguistic aspects are utilized as part of the brands' marketing strategies.

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