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# HSBC'S CULTURAL-THEMED-ADVERTISEMENT IN POLITENESS PRINCIPLE AND RELEVANCE THEORY

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**Abstrak:** Ditinjau dari fungsinya, iklan digunakan untuk memperkenalkan produk dan menjadi mempengaruhi orang agar membeli produk atau jasa tertentu. Globalisasi telah mengakibatkan pasar bisnis yang besar bagi para produsen. Sehingga pembuatan iklan untuk mengenalkan produk ke pasar menjadi semakin bervariasi. Perbedaan budaya target menjadi salah satu pertimbangan dalam memilih bahasa iklan. Sebuah seri iklan bertema budaya oleh HSBC sejak 2002 menekankan pada kesadaran pentingnya budaya dan kemampuan untuk menguasai bisnis serta finansial secara global. Prinsip kesopanan merupakan salah satu cara yang efektif untuk mengemas tujuan bank secara wajar dan pada akhirnya akan berdampak positif bagi bank. Teori Relevansi (Sperber and Wilson) digunakan untuk mendeskripsikan cara berkomunikasi HSBC dengan nasabahnya di seluruh dunia. Dalam studi ini, peneliti menggunakan metode Analisis Isi untuk membedah objek, yakni iklan HSBC. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya penggunaan prinsip kesopanan dan teori relevansi dalam iklan. Kedua teori tersebut digunakan dalam rangka mencapai tujuan utama iklan HSBC, yakni menjadi iklan yang paling diingat oleh para pelanggannya.

**Kata kunci:** Iklan Bertema Budaya, Prinsip Kesopanan, Teori Relevansi

**Abstract:** Advertisements have evolved from its basic role; introducing product or services; into persuading people to buy or use particular product or services. Globalization does create an immense business market for the producers. Different target cultures become one of the considerations for language chosen. A series of cultural-themed-advertisement by HSBC since 2002, emphasize on its awareness of each culture and their ability to cope business and financial globally. Politeness Principles is one of effective way to cover the bank's initial goal properly to get more desirable impact. Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory is also useful to describes the communication act between HSBC (though the hands of advertisers) with the banking consumers' across the world. The researcher used Content Analysis method for the objects. Cultural-themed-bank-advertisements showed the use of Politeness Principle and Relevance Theory. The advertisement used both theories to achieve their utmost goal, becoming the most memorable advertisement in their costumers' mind.

**Keywords:** Cultural-themed-advertisement, Politeness Principle, Relevance Theory

## INTRODUCTION

Advertisements have evolved from its basic role; introducing product or services; into sophisticated one. One of the sophisticated roles of modern advertisements is to persuade or even to manipulate people into buying or using particular product or services. Language use is crucial to create such important goal. The advertisers use language to draw attention, communicate the point and convince the consumers about their product or services (Tungate, 2007:2). They manipulate words, grammar, and other language devices to do so. Advertisers are in the habit of using alliteration, rhyme, rhythm, metaphor, puns, wordplay, etc.

Globalization does create an immense business market for the producers. Different target cultures become one of the considerations for language chosen. The Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC) is a successful example of blending local culture to globalization (Boudreau and Watson, 2006:31). It owns numerous banking chains in Asia, Europe, and America. One of its successful campaigns is those taking “the world’s local bank” as its tagline. The bank has been producing a series of cultural-diverse- advertisements since 2002. Those advertisements emphasize on HSBC’s awareness of each culture and their ability to cope business and financial globally Montgomery (2008:130). The advertisements show wide variety of cross cultural awareness; from gift, custom, gestures, and even way to do business. All is shown in an interesting monolog or dialog with representative scenes.

As HSBC’s target the global as well as local market, the language devices must meet both the communicative and cultural goal. In both print and visual, the advertisement use the language for the utmost effect; captivating and luring people to do business and financial with HSBC.

Gaining global trust on one particular bank is quite difficult to do, especially when competitions are tight and the people are critical. To achieve such impact for global target, the advertisement should ensure the target message can be conveyed by the addressee. According to Cook, “*it needs to pay close attention not only to human cognitive processes in general, but also to features specific to a given culture.*” (Cook, 2001:4)

The study of advertising language especially for the visual clips is more likely to use pragmatic approach. According to Chen (2011:30) since advertisements usually take

forms as persuasive speech act, the Politeness Principles in one of effective way to describe such form of communication. This principle is based on the logic that people value courtesy higher than the opposite. Advertisements which cover their initial goal properly are likely got more desirable impact.

Another linguistic principle which can give through description on such phenomena in advertisement field is Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory. This theory describes the communication act between HSBC (through the hands of advertisers) with the banking consumers' across the world. The *ostensive inferential process* within each communication act enables the addresser/advertiser to use various media as ostensive stimuli to make their goal apparent to the addressee/consumer.

In case of politeness principle, advertising employs Politeness Principle to captivate people's mind for particular products or services. Politeness Principle by Leech (1983) is rooted from Gricke's Cooperative Principle. According to Leech (1995:79), Politeness Principle is the complementary of Cooperative Principle. This principle provides complement explanation on the impact of politeness for successful communication. Instead of four maxims proposed by Gricke, Leech proposes six politeness maxims, the tact maxim, generosity maxim, approbation maxim, modesty maxim, agreement maxim, sympathy maxim. Those maxims are reflected in highlighting the interests of customers, stressing self-damaged, praising the customers' choice on the face, secretly praising the production, emphasizing the same position with customers, and trying to obtain the same feelings with customers (Liu, 2012:2622). By applying the principle, the advertisers are "discreetly planting" their ideas into the costumer's mind. This principle creates less offensive imaging for marketing purpose.

The first maxim in Leech's Politeness Principle is tact maxim. Tact maxim is used to minimize cost to other and maximizes benefit to other. The second is generosity maxim. Generosity maxim minimizes benefit to self and maximizes cost to self. The third maxim is approbation maxim. It minimizes dispraise of other and maximizes praise of other. The fourth maxim is modesty maxim. This maxim minimizes praise of self and maximizes dispraise of self. The fourth maxim is agreement maxim. The maxim minimizes disagreement between self and other, and maximizes agreement between self and other. The last is sympathy maxim which minimizes antipathy between self and other and maximizes sympathy between self and other (Leech, 1983).

Another complimentary theory from Cooperative Principle is Relevance Theory by Sperber and Wilson. This theory is mainly focused on Grice's maxim of relevance (Sperber and Wilson, 2002:250). Maxim of relevance has two principles; cognitive principle and communication principle. The cognitive principle in the Relevance Theory is focused use of background knowledge to maximize the effect of language. The communication principle is focused on the use of language to optimally create particular vivid image. The latest principle is also known as the ostensive-inferential. In short, communication is an ostensive-inferential process in which context plays as the key factor.

In the context of advertisement, the producers through the hand of the advertisers always look for the best strategies to communicate their message. They use language which provides the right ostensive stimuli for the customers to catch their attention. Those stimuli eventually bring the optimal relevance for their product's promotion and propaganda.

Different choice of words, phrases, clauses and sentences are chosen by the advertisers to reach the advertising goal. Most of the advertisers usually use simple yet captivating tagline or slogan to inform the superiority of their product. The familiar tagline or slogan is made to make the audience familiar and directly associate the product with its particular context, as to boost appearance, increase prestige, and create happiness.

Some previous studies in the field of politeness principle and relevance theory have been conducted by some researchers, such as Lazović's (2014), Noviani (2011), and Cortés De Los Ríos (2007). Lazović's study in 2014 on The Language of Online Bank Advertisement in English used HSBC as one of its sample. The study was about typical linguistic features of online banks advertisement in UK in 2012. Taking 185 British advertisements from 30 most prominent banks in UK, the study concludes that online bank advertising is characterized by direct reader addressing, which imitates aspects of spoken language. The researcher then implied the result of the study to be applied in ESP teaching.

A study by Noviani (2011) on the ways in which TV advertisements construct discursive strategies to define and represent ethnic/racial differences in Indonesia by using social semiotics and narrative analysis compared 68 advertisements in Indonesia.

The study emphasized the use of advertisement to superiority of ethnic/race based on the skin color. HSBC advertisement was used as one of the illustration on advertisement's power to reshape the cultural perspective of particular ethnic/race.

Cortés De Los Ríos's article (2007) on the use of banking advertisements for teaching vocabulary in BE class also used HSBC advertisement as one of the teaching source. The article emphasized the use of metaphor in the banking advertisement to help them making a good loan advertisement. Boudreau and Watson's study in 2006 showed that HSBC applied integrative advertising strategy. Furthermore, the bank has established position in banking industry because its globalization theme.

Those previous studies relate the advertising language to various fields of study; general linguistic, social study, and marketing. The study of advertising language of HSBC has never been specific, especially in pragmatics term. Most of the study uses HSBC as one of the sample in the study. The study of HSBC's cultural advertisement in term of pragmatic is worth to do.

This paper focuses on of two HSBC cultural advertisements clips. Those clips are then described and analyzed based on its effectiveness to influence the local and global banking consumer. The advertisements were chosen because they showed both strong manipulative language and its point on cultural differences. The purpose of this paper is to gain better understanding on how language can be manipulated to change and persuade people from different culture for specific goal; choose HSBC as their business and financial partner.

## **METHOD**

The researcher used Content Analysis method for conducting this study. Babbie (1990:89) defines Contents Analysis as the study of recorded human communications, such as books, websites, paintings and laws. This kind of method is used for linguistic research. It is used to analyze recorded transcripts of the object (advertisement). The data then listed and classified for the use politeness principle and ostensive-inferential theory.



## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The first advertisement is about a young man from English speaking county who moved/temporary lived in Italy. In his first day there, he met a beautiful young woman named Sofia. On the next day, the young man was in the café when Sofia passed by and brought heavy shopping bag. The young man offered to help her with her shopping. He also walked her home. The day after that, he went to Sofia's house again and put a bouquet of chrysanthemum in her motorcycle, which she put in front of her house. Right after the young man left, a truck accidentally bumped on the motorcycle. The motorcycle fell down. Upon seeing her motorcycle and the bouquet, one of Sofia's neighbor supposed that she passed away because the accident. When Sofia went out to see what's going on, her neighbors ran away as if she was ghost. This incident would not be happening, if the young man did not put chrysanthemums in Sofia's motorcycle. The narrator then gave additional information why the incident happened by saying:

In Italy, different flowers have different meaning; chrysanthemums for example are associated with funeral and sadness.

The previous sentence provides the inference of flower and its' different meaning in different culture. The man in the advertisement is lack of cultural knowledge. He gave chrysanthemums to show his interest (love) toward the Italian woman. But this turned out to be a blunder because of the incident followed. Instead of becoming a sign of pure love as implied by the meaning of chrysanthemum in USA, the flower was regarded as a sign of mourning for the woman's death.

This advertisement showed the use of Sympathy Maxim. It is shown in the last sentence of the advertisement which is also the slogan.

At HSBC we never underestimate the in importance of the local knowledge. HSBC, the world's local bank.

The previous sentence shows that the bank has the knowledge about their prospective customers in terms of cultural code. As a bank which holds worldwide recognition, the bank won't do any wrong action toward its consumers as the man in the advertisement did, because they know all the cultural-bound-taboos in different countries.

The last sentence shows that HSBC is highly concerned about it costumer's cultural background. It shows that the bank can handle different people from different

cultural background well. Their knowledge on people custom, tradition, and belief which rooted from their culture, make the bank able to give world class services yet respect the cultural differences.

The second advertisement is about a salesman who was sent to India to find out why his company sold more washing machines in India than any other countries. The salesman went to India in monsoon. Monsoon is a season in which rain is heavily poured in India. The rain even caused flood. The season was assumed as the reason of the high selling of washing machine in India. This assumption turned out to be wrong as the salesman found out that the washing machine was used as tea-stirring-machine.

The washing machine and India became the ostensive-inferential-trigger in this advertisement. When people hear the word washing machine, they will picture of an electric machine which they usually use to wash the laundry. The advertisement used the washing machine as their way to draw the costumers' attention that there was another use of washing machine. In India, washing machine is used as tea-stirring-machine, because the Indians' fond of tea. Moreover, the climate (rain) in India made the tea-gathering as part of trend.

This advertisement also used the sympathy maxim. The principle of sympathy maxim: *minimizes antipathy between self and other and maximizes sympathy between self and other* which ere shown in:

If you're going to do business internationally, you should be with the bank for most valid international business.  
Your business' success is out there, it's your bank

The first sentence shows that that HSBC is a bank which accommodates people who want to do business internationally. It also assures that it provides the customers with the most reliable services for international business. The second sentence points out that if the costumers choose HSBC as their bank, they surely in their way to success in business.

## CONCLUSION

Cultural-themed-bank-advertisements showed the use of Politeness Principle and Relevance Theory. The advertisement used both theories to achieve their utmost goal, becoming the most memorable advertisement in their costumers' mind. Thus, their

costumers will always have their bank in mind whenever they want to do some banking business.

The sympathy maxim is mostly applied in cultural-bound-bank-advertisements. Sympathy maxim is used to plant the idea of the advertiser smoothly. The advertisers seem to realize that today's costumers do not like to have exaggeration in terms of banking services. They tend to like the advertisement which shows sincere and almost-real fact of the banking service.

To make it more memorable, the advertiser gave key word for each advertisement. They chose familiar word that has different cultural bound for different countries. By using the word and depiction on the scene, they were successful to portray HSBC as a recommended bank which provide world-class banking service yet respect different cultural taboos.

The use of Politeness Principle and Relevance theory in bank-advertisement can be used as the real example of the linguistic principle for effective communication. Learning both theories will provide the students with ammunition to target the specific language use. They can use either or both theories for communicating the ideas or thinking to the others effectively.

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