

## EXPRESSION OF LANGUAGE IN CONSTRUCTING PHYSICAL FEMININITY WRITTEN IN INDONESIAN TEEN LIT

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### **Abstract:-**

*Physical femininity is a feminine imagery pictured through the corporeal aspects. Physical femininity in Indonesian teen lit is quite dominant along with the opposition statement stated that beauty is diverse. Teenlit, to be known, is a novel that depicts the lives of adolescence around the middle to secondary school age and typically uses women characters point of view. This paper aims to describe the expression of language in constructing a physical femininity written in teen lit using critical discourse analysis. The data are in the form of linguistic units used to express the conception of physical femininity obtained from five popular Indonesian teen lit. The result of data analysis shows that there are six expressions of language for constructing physical femininity, such as the use of synonyms of beautiful, denial of the negative judgment, affirmation of the stigma, the use of diction about hair, analogy of women's beauty using popular figure, and giving a negative connotation to the dandy. Beauty is always closely attached to the female figure. However, this concept of beauty is dynamic along with the times. The use of the word sweet, charming, quirky, and cute as the pronoun of the word pretty clearly shows that beauty is diverse. Through these various expressions, women wanted to be appreciated as she is. Therefore, women need to have a high self-confidence and need to respect themselves as well as others.*

**Key Words:-** Teenlit, Expression of Language, Physical Femininity

## INTRODUCTION

Physical femininity is one of the prominent femininity aspects in Indonesian teen lit. Physical femininity associated with the feminine image through corporeal things, for instance body shape, face, complexion, and hair. As we know that physical appearance is closely identical with a beauty which becomes a benchmark for women's femininity (Foka, 2015, Adolph, 2016)

Cultural reality shows that physical femininity is very vital for women as reflected in Indonesian teen lit. The resistance to pop culture about beauty ended by a certain image of beauty women have.

Teenlit is the designation given to a novel that depicting the teenagers' life. Generally, it uses female's perspective and is written by the female writer. It is also a medium that has a major influence, especially against young women. Teenlit is not solely beautiful product functioned as entertainment, yet one of the social reality product. Teenlit can project a teenager's life and as a reference in dressing up, mingling, and social and economic activities.

The teen lit phenomenon is in line with the statement of Jacobs (2004) that the media plays a significant role in the development of feminine identity. Teenlit is one of the events as stated by Lee (2011) as the practice of critical reading literacy in which critical reading is needed to conduct. This paper, then, describes the use of language that shows how language is used to marginalize certain values and confirmed the other values.

## Context of Review

Physical femininity is closely related to beauty, especially refer to women. The term of beautiful is equally to gorgeous and comely which originally refers to the women's appearance or face (*Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa*, 2016).

Regarding the self-image of women through this term of beauty, Vidyarini (2007) provides confirmation of body parts that should be beautified so that a person meets the criteria of a particular beauty which are face, hair, skin, hands, feet, and the whole body in general.

As a result of the construction, the conceptualization of physical femininity is socially bound, one of them is marked by cultural icon existing in society. According to Rogers (1999), the cultural icon represents the pop culture of beauty in general that is defined as fair skin, tall, slender and slim body shape. This view of the importance of beauty is closely related to the concept of femininity constructed by consumerism culture (Mochtar, 2009) shown by the models used in cosmetics TV advertisement showing clean face, fair, and type of Aryan race. In addition, the models also have tall and slim posture. Nevertheless, in most of the ads, the chosen model has black, straight, and shiny hair.

Although beauty icons is oriented to the beauty of women from the Aryan race, Kompas (2016) that in the past two decades, the popularity of non-fair-skin women is getting higher. There are an increasing number of singers and artists which are Hispanic, black, Asian with their strong influence toward the world. This certainly helps to change the idea of defining the word "beautiful" as feminists' criticism which concerns on the formation of body image done by beauty industry such as shown in the advertising. In this situation, young adult novels or teen lit exists.

Indonesian teen lit generally indicates the nature of femininity which distinguishes teen lit from other young adult novels in general. Research conducted by Noor (2014) reported that most of the teen list novelist (and chick lit) are female which age ranges 14 to 20 years old. The authors are in the category of smart, rich, likes to read and write, and is active in activities at school or college.

The influence of teen lit has been investigated by Rahmaningsih and Martani (2014). Their research shows that the figures in the novel will affect self-concept of the readers through the mechanism of social comparison and modeling. Through observation of the various figures in teen lit, teenagers tend to be attentive to superior figures. Therefore, a social comparison can trigger a negative self-concept. However, a social comparison which is followed by critical judgment or based on self-improvement motive will positively affect self-concept.

The close relationship between teen lit and teenagers is reflected in the titles of teen lit published each year with a sizable circulation. A Teenlit can be printed twelve thousand copies in the first printing, and five to seven thousand copies on the next printing (Kompas, 2005). A popular teen lit can be printed more than ten times.

## Method of the Study

The method of this current study is critical discourse analysis. Teenlit critical discourse analysis is based on the consideration that teen lit is one of the textual forms which is also part of the social events (Fairclough, 2003).

The data are in the form of lingual features used for the construction of femininity in the key events that make up the story. The data sources are five popular Teenlit from various publishers, which are (1) *Me vs. High Heels* by Maria Ardelia, (2) *Kana di Negeri Kiwi* by of Rosemary Kesauly, (3) *Fairish* by Esti Kinasih, (4) *Raksasa dari Jogja* by Dwitarsari, and (5) *Dear Baba* by Sabrina Putri Lofissa.

Analyses were carried out by describing lingual features as a starting way to uncover physical conception of femininity in the teen lit. The interpretation phase was conducted by analyzing the context of the situation within the text. The next stage is that exploring range of values underlying the conceptualization of physical femininity in the teen lit.

## Findings

The expression of language used for constructing physical femininity in the teen lit consists of: (1) the use of synonyms of the term "beautiful" (2) denial of the negative judgment, (3) the use of diction about hair, (4) stigma affirmation, (5) analogy of female beauty using particular icons, and (6) giving a negative connotation to the term of dandy.

The use of synonyms for instance pretty, *interesting*, *unique*, *sweet*, *petite*, *cute* is intended to express beauty. The word *sweet*, *petite* and *cute* refer to Fairish characters in the *Fairish*. The word *sweet* and *little* are used in *Dear Baba*

in order to describe the Akasma character. Kana's father in the teen lit of *Kana di Negeri Kiwi* also said that she is a sweet girl. In addition to the word *sweet*, Kana is also described as a unique and attractive girl.

Disclaimer against the negative judgment in the teen lit is used to reinforce the main beauty of main protagonist character in the teen lit. The objection form of rebuttal is as the judgment of the antagonistic character of the physical protagonist who is not considered ideal. The denial is done by adding the negation and the use modalities to weaken ratings from the antagonists, for example, *a little bit fat, not fat so*, and *is my face like Mak Lampir* (characters in the stories of Mystery of Mount Merapi who has the magic, ugly face, and has very famous in Indonesia in 2000s).

The stereotype is also found in the teen lit. The stereotype used to reinforce the image of beautiful is done by the figure of mother to Sasha in *Me vs. High Heels*. Sasha's mother strictly ban Shasha to have hair cut because it will distinct Sasha from men. In addition, there is also a stigma that fair complexion is beautiful as found in *Fairish*. The diction about the hair found in all teen lit samples studied. The protagonist women characters in those teen lit are generally found having long hair. Sasha who has manly in characters in *Me vs. High Heels*, Fairish who is simple in *Fairish*, Kana in *Kana di Negeri Kiwi*, Bianca in *the Raksasa dari Jogja*, and Akasma in *the Dear Baba*, all of them have long hair. Thus, the narrative diction found lots of hair, such as *wave, pigtails, tie, bun, and loose hair*. In addition, it is also found a number of adjectives that describe the hair, such as *long, curly, and ponytail styles*.

A Cultural icon is also used to reinforce the typical beauty of protagonist characters in Teenlit. Kana, for instance always concerns on the body that is a bit fat, Jyotika – the companions in *Kana di Negeri Kiwi* also refer to Drew Barrymore.

The negative expression about the term dandy is carried out prominently by giving a bad image on their appearance as well as behavior. The phrase about dandy given by the characters inter alia mother like, attention seeker, and person who is identical to the bathroom.

## Discussion

It is found out that there are various forms of language expressions in constructing physical femininity found in the teenlit. The expressions are associated with a beautiful image that is marginalized and edified.

### *The Use of Synonyms of Beautiful*

The use of synonyms of beautiful is found in the teen lit to reveal the beauty of the main female protagonist character. Most of the beauty of the figure is verbalized using the word beautiful. In the narrative, as well as dialogue and monolog of the figure, it is also found the word *interesting, unique, sweet, cute, and petite* to label one's beauty. The meaning of these words is not really the same with beautiful as each word has its peculiarities of the meaning. It is hard to find words that are really synonymous or pure synonyms in all contexts (Hartmann and Stork, 1971).

The word *unique* is aligned with *special*. The word *unique* means special in form or kind; different from others; and nothing in common with the others (Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa, 2016). The word *unique* which is used by Tsunehisa to express his admiration to Kana in the teen lit of *Kana di Negeri Kiwi* (Kesaully, 2005). The expression of admiration is based on the uniqueness of Kana compared to other students in Riverdale College. The word *unique* can represent typical beauty Kana has. Kana has mixed blood of New Zealand and Indonesia with curly hair and brown skin so that she looked very different from the other pupils.

In addition, the word *sweet* is also used. The word *sweet* refers to the beauty of the main protagonists also found in a number of teen lit. The word can be interpreted as *a sweet taste like sugar, beautiful, charming, and pretty* (Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa, 2016). Irish in *the Fairish* (Kinasih, 2004) always says that she is *sweet*, it is a form of rebuttal on her friends' opinion who consider Irish not as pretty as popular girls nor Davi – the handsome boy at school.

Besides in *Fairish*, the word *sweet* is also used in *the Kana di Negeri Kiwi* (Kesaully, 2005). Kana's father stated that she is *a sweet girl whom everybody loves*. Akasma's father in *Dear Baba* (Lofissa, 2015) also said that Akasma is *a sweet girl, the girl that inherit the her mom's beauty as well as special gift*. This can mean the form on how to state face attractiveness which is not only beautiful but also special and unique. It can refer to unborning beauty or good behavior of the person.

Another diction used to highlight that physical beauty is not always synonymous with fair and tall is the use of the words *petite* and *cute*. *Petite* and *cute* are not the synonyms of beautiful. Nonetheless, those two synonymous words have a close relationship with the word "beautiful". Irish in *Fairish* (Kinasih, 2004) is frequently described as *petite* and *cute* in the narrative and dialogue by other figures. Akasma in *Dear Baba* (Lofissa, 20015) is also described as a *petite* figure.

*Petite*, furthermore, is the antonym of *great*. *Petite* can be used to reveal the beauty of someone who is not that tall as it is equal to small. It has positive connotation than the word small which meaning is more straightforward. *Cute* based on Indonesian dictionary is defined as a small chic, elegant, and cute (childhood) (Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa, 2016). The word *cute* is also meant as sweet and adorable (Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa, 2016). Those two words (*small* and *cute*) are used to reveal the beauty of a person with certain characteristics, which is small.

The use of dictions such as *unique, sweet, tiny, cute, and charming* in teen lit is intended to emphasize that beauty is relative. Beauty can be very distinctive and individual. Each person has its own appeal. All the physical features, for instance tall, short, slim, fat, black, olive, straight or curly hair have its specialty.

In addition, it is highlighted that the use of those words is aimed to inform that beauty is relative based on the personal perspective. The form of disclosure of such diverse beauty should be understood not merely as a matter of

terminology for words that give certain senses and meanings when it is received by the audience, but through a *unique, sweet, tiny, cute*, and the like, the audiences are expected to be able to get a variety of perspectives about beauty.

### **Refutation**

Disclaimer to the physical judgments is made to confirm the physical beauty of the main protagonists has varied. The diversity is generally not considered as ideal by the antagonist so that they're always making fun of the protagonists. In the dialog of the antagonist, it is discovered that there are many physical judgment against the main protagonist. In the most teen lit, it is emphasized that the being tall and slim has high importance for women, but it is confirmed in the end that beauty is diverse.

Sasha in *Me vs. High Heels* (Ardelia, 2004) has stocky and dull complexions is humiliated by Arnold who judged that her diet did not succeed. Irish in *Fairish* (Kinasih, 2004) has petite body always gets a mockery from Metha and friends by stating some words such as *small, malnourished, like an ugly duckling, like guinea pigs, and monkeys*. In *Kana di Negeri Kiwi* (Kesaulu, 2005), Kana who has fleshy has to break her relationship with Rudy as Rudy thought that Kana is *a ball by his side*, Kana is also derided as *a fat koala from Indonesia* by Kelly Fletcher which strengthens her feeling like a fat girl just like a *barrel*.

Eventually, the protagonists found out that the price of a person is not merely seen from physical. Further, protagonists also realized that it is not as bad not what antagonists stated so that they do denial in various ways. Fairish, for instance, grumble in her monolog by saying "is my face as bad as *Mak Lampir*?" This rhetorical question is a kind of self-belief that Fairish is not as bad as *Mak Lampir*.

Kana thought that she is fat and she got the defense from her friend who always said that she is not that fat. The negation words used are not and the like which is the easiest and simplest way to do refutation. This way is also done by Jyotika in order to calm down Kana who is worry about her fat. Phrases with the attributes, for examples *not, do not look fat, a little fat* are used to disguise the boundaries of fat and slim as a function of modal qualifier which is in line with the statement of Toulmin (1979) that shows a wide degree of certainty or likelihood. The phrases, such as *does not lean so, do not look fat, chubby little fat or slim* means that fat or slim is relative.

Negation is *not, do not* and a *bit* are used to weaken the judgment of the antagonist to the physical condition considered as less ideal often stated by the antagonist using some phrases such as *fat, like zero form, and like fat koala*. Thus, the protagonists feel confident so that it no needed to think over other people's negative physical judgmental on them.

### **Stereotype Affirmation**

Stereotype affirmation to to assert physical femininity of women is done for instance toward the cliché statement that women should have long hair. The stereotype is found in *me vs. High Heels* (Ardelia, 2004). Sasha is categorized as sporty and boyish figure. She likes doing sports such as basketball, rock climbing, and even boxing. Sasha also really enjoy having interaction with men. She is comfortable to be in a group of men without worrying of being harassed. She played basketball with men, became friends and have so much fun and talk about what men loved, such as football, basketball, boxing, and so forth. However, Sasha still keeps her long hair. Through mother figure, Sasha is forbidden to have haircut as it is used to distinguish women from men.

In the Indonesian culture in general, hair is a crown for girls. In Javanese culture describe that a good hair for women is like mayang. Mayang parse is parse beautiful long hair flower tubs palm (coconut, palm, areca nut) (Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa 2016).

Another stereotype of beauty has fair complexion. It is found in a *Fairish* (Kinasih, 2004). Fairish's friends who is envy with her stated that Fairish is like white guinea pig as she is cute and have fair skin. One day, Fairish complained about that situation by saying "Luckily, I am fair. I cannot imagine if I am dark and small. I will be like a rat." This affirms that having fair skin is better or considered as more beautiful than dark skin. Thus, it can be inferred that there is such marginalization of being dark and small as it is seen as worse than being fair and tall.

### **The Use of Diction about Hair**

The use of diction about the hair found in all teen lit. The protagonist women characters in general have long hair. Sasha, the sporty girl in *Me vs. High Heels* (Ardelia, 2004), Fairish, the simple girl in *Fairish* (Kinasih 2004), Kana in *Kana di Negeri Kiwi* (Kesaulu, 2005), Bianca in *Raksasa dari Jogja* (Dwitasari, 2012), and Akasma in *Dear Baba* (Lofissa, 2015), all of them have long hair.

Shasa is characterized as a sporty girl, yet it is explicitly stated that she has long hair. Her mother never complains about her appearance and behavior of being sporty and boyish as long as she keep her hair long. In addition, the author also mentions that Sasha usually tied her hair, let them in the ponytail, and she has bun style in her birthday party. The readers will find a lot of description related to long hair in order to describe Shasa.

The use of words related to the hair is also found in other Teenlit. Fairish, for example, also has long hair that is kept loose and flows. Similarly, Aksma is also explicitly described that she has long wavy hair.

Long hair has become a part of female identity. Feminine is identical with long hair. Cutting the hair is a taboo thing to do especially for women. It is as told in *the me vs. High Heels* (Ardelia, 2004). Therefore, the phrases associated with long hair are found to describe the female protagonist characters. The word that indicates the specific treatment of the hair, such as ponytail, bun style, or loose are found in all teen lit. Similarly, words that show action of flicking long hair are often found to describe the movements of the female protagonist.

### ***Analogy of Beauty with Popular Figure***

Beauty asserted in Teenlit is diverse beauty. The main figure is used as a reference to represent the diversity of beauty. In *Kana di Negeri Kiwi*, the beauty of Jyotika is aligned with Kajol, Indian actress. Bruna who is a student from Brazil is described as Cleopatra, the queen of Egypt. Kajol is described as the woman with long hair with a good nose, and Cleopatra is slim and sexy.

The Gorgeous figure is no longer identical with European or American artist, yet it is still defined as having fair skin and a slender body shape which the protagonist women characters obsessed. However, they realized that beauty is relative on the hands of its beholder eventually. In other word, there is no standard to define beauty.

In order to affirm that beauty is relative, the authors use well-known public figure as a reference, for instance Jyotika in *Kana di Negeri Kiwi* take the reference figure of Drew Barrymore to sooth Kana as she is worried on her fat. Drew Barrymore is considered as the figure that is not slim, yet she remains beautiful and charming. She is successful in a number of popular films, including Charlie's Angels.

The use of well-known figures as cultural icons of beauty is common in public life. Rogers (1999) laid figures on the lowest level of pop culture marker. Therefore, the use of well-known figure who has a uniqueness in their beauty is a common thing.

### ***Negative Connotation to the Dandies***

Giving negative connotation is done to marginalize the figure of dandies. In *Fairish* (Kinasih, 2004), the figure of Davi who likes to put on makeup looks like aged women. In addition, the figure Metha with her glamorous appearance and full of makeup look like her mom so that it's hard for Davi to distinguish two of them.

Dandy figures are also marginalized in *Kana di Negeri Kiwi* (Kesaully, 2005). The marginalization is done by giving bad connotation assessment, for example, as *the attention seeker, party queen, the stage queen*. The word *queen* is used in this context as it is identical with excessive grooming. In another teen lit, dandy is identified with the girl who spent her time in the toilet to dress up, likes to go around mall, and get fake attention from the public.

By giving a negative connotation toward dandy, it meant that teenagers should not be grooming with over makeup or polish so that it can show the real youth of them. Beauty for young school age girl is the result of a clean and healthy lifestyle. Beauty salon is done for the reason of hygiene and health.

### **Conclusion**

The amount of values delivered in the teen lit should ignite the awareness that it is not solely aesthetic products for entertainment, but it also represents a social reality. As teen lit delivered a number of moral messages, it can be used as a tool to identify a group of people, especially teenagers. The teen lit contains distinctive aesthetic language which is able to uncover the realities so that critical reading is vitally required to conduct.

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