

SOCIOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF “ODOL” AS A GENERIC TERM IN INDONESIA DISCOURSE

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Abstract

This study investigates the phenomenon of genericide in Indonesian daily discourse through the widespread use of the word “odol” as a generic term for toothpaste. Originally a registered brand name, “Odol” has undergone a semantic shift, losing its brand-specific reference and becoming a common lexical item in everyday communication. Employing a qualitative research approach, data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire distributed via Google Forms to Indonesian language users from various age groups and regions. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns related to language habit, brand awareness, intergenerational transmission, and linguistic efficiency. The findings reveal that most respondents use the word “odol” automatically and habitually without considering brand distinctions. Many participants were unaware that “Odol” was originally a brand name, while others acknowledged its brand origin but continued to use the term generically due to familiarity and convenience. Family environment emerged as a key factor in the transmission of this usage, with most respondents reporting that they first learned the term from parents or caregivers. Additionally, respondents perceived “odol” as more natural and efficient than the formal term “pasta gigi,” particularly in informal contexts. These findings confirm that the use of “odol” represents a clear case of genericide, driven by social habit, intergenerational language transmission, and pragmatic considerations. The study demonstrates how commercial terminology can become fully integrated into everyday language, contributing to semantic change in Indonesian. This research provides insight into the interaction between language, culture, and consumer practices, and highlights the importance of examining ordinary lexical items to understand broader processes of language change.

Keywords: Genericide, semantic change, brand name, sociolinguistics

INTRODUCTION

Language is not a static system; it continuously changes in response to social, cultural, and economic factors. According to Saussure (1916), language is a social product that evolves through collective use, making semantic change an inevitable aspect of linguistic development. One manifestation of such change is the shift in meaning of certain lexical items, particularly those originating from commercial brands. In Indonesian daily discourse, the term “odol” is widely used to refer to toothpaste in general, despite originally being the name of a specific brand. This phenomenon illustrates a process known as genericide, in which a trademark becomes a common noun through extensive and habitual use.

The use of brand names as generic terms has been widely discussed in linguistic and legal studies. Crystal (2003) explains that frequent and dominant usage can cause proper

nouns to lose their specificity and enter the lexicon as common nouns. Similarly, Keller (1994) argues that language change is driven by collective, unconscious actions of speakers rather than deliberate planning. In this sense, the generic use of “odol” reflects unconscious linguistic behavior shaped by repetition and social convention.

In Indonesian daily communication, the word “odol” functions as an unmarked lexical choice, often replacing the more formal term “pasta gigi.” From a semantic perspective, this represents a process of generalization or semantic broadening, where a word’s meaning expands from a specific referent to a broader category (Lyons, 1977). This semantic shift is reinforced through everyday interactions, particularly within family domains, where parents commonly instruct children using the term “odol,” thereby transmitting the usage across generations.

From a sociolinguistic viewpoint, language choice is closely related to social practice and habit. Holmes (2013) emphasizes that everyday language use reflects social norms and shared cultural knowledge. The widespread use of “odol” suggests that the term has become culturally entrenched, no longer perceived as a brand but as a neutral noun. This aligns with Fairclough’s (1995) view that discourse both reflects and shapes social reality, including consumer behavior and cultural memory.

Despite its prevalence, the phenomenon of genericide in Indonesian has received limited academic attention, particularly in relation to everyday consumer vocabulary. Most existing studies on semantic change in Indonesian focus on slang, youth language, or expressive discourse, leaving brand-based lexical shifts relatively underexplored. This creates a research gap in understanding how commercial terms become fully integrated into the linguistic system of everyday communication.

This research aims to analyze how “odol” functions linguistically in contemporary Indonesian discourse and to identify the social factors that contribute to its generic usage. By examining this phenomenon, the study highlights the interaction between language, culture, and consumer practices in shaping lexical meaning.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research approach to explore the phenomenon of genericide in the use of the word “odol” in Indonesian daily discourse. A qualitative design was selected to allow for an in-depth understanding of participants’ perceptions, language habits, and interpretations regarding the use of “odol” as a generic term for toothpaste.

The primary research instrument was a questionnaire consisting of open-ended questions. This type of instrument was chosen to provide respondents with the flexibility to express their thoughts, experiences, and reasoning in their own words, which is essential for capturing nuanced linguistic and social insights. According to Creswell (2014), open-ended questions are particularly effective in qualitative research as they enable researchers to explore meanings and perspectives that may not emerge through closed-ended responses.

Data were collected using the Google Forms platform. Google Forms was selected due to its accessibility, ease of distribution, and ability to reach respondents from diverse backgrounds efficiently. The platform also ensured respondent anonymity, which encouraged honest and natural responses. The questionnaire focused on several key aspects, including respondents’ preferred term for toothpaste, their awareness of “Odol” as a brand

name, the contexts in which the term is used, and their perceptions of why “odol” is commonly employed in everyday speech.

The participants of this study were Indonesian language users from various age groups and educational backgrounds. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, with the main criterion being familiarity with daily Indonesian language use. This sampling method was considered appropriate for qualitative research, as it allows the researcher to select participants who can provide relevant and information-rich data (Patton, 2015).

Data analysis was conducted through thematic analysis. Responses were carefully read, coded, and grouped into recurring themes such as habit, intergenerational transmission, linguistic efficiency, and lack of brand awareness. Semantic analysis was applied to examine the shift in meaning of “odol” from a brand-specific term to a generic noun, while a sociolinguistic perspective was used to interpret how social practices and cultural norms influence this usage.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings and discussion based on qualitative data collected through open-ended questionnaires distributed via Google Forms. A total of 28 respondents from various regions participated in this study, providing rich descriptions of their language habits, perceptions, and awareness regarding the use of the word “odol.” The analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, focusing on recurring patterns related to language habit, semantic perception, and sociocultural factors.

Patterns of Word Choice in Daily Communication

The results show that the majority of respondents reported using the word “odol” as their primary term for referring to toothpaste in everyday conversation. Most respondents stated that the term is used automatically and habitually, especially in informal contexts such as at home or when speaking with family and close friends. Only a small number of respondents mentioned regularly using the term “pasta gigi,” and these instances were generally associated with formal situations or explanatory contexts.

This finding indicates that “odol” has become the unmarked lexical choice in daily Indonesian discourse. Semantically, this reflects a process of generalization, where a brand name expands its reference to cover an entire product category. This supports Lyons’ (1977) concept of semantic broadening, in which repeated usage in varied contexts weakens the specificity of a word’s original meaning.

Awareness of “Odol” as a Brand Name

Regarding brand awareness, respondents demonstrated varied levels of knowledge. Several participants admitted that they were unaware that “Odol” was originally a brand name before filling out the questionnaire. Others reported knowing that it was a brand but still used the term generically in daily speech. This suggests that awareness of brand origin does not necessarily influence actual language use.

This phenomenon aligns with Keller’s (1994) theory that language change occurs through unconscious collective behavior rather than intentional decision-making. Even

when speakers possess metalinguistic awareness, habitual usage remains dominant, reinforcing the process of genericide.

Social and Intergenerational Transmission

The data reveal that family plays a significant role in the transmission of the term “odol.” Most respondents stated that they first learned the word from parents or older family members. The instruction “ambil odol” was commonly cited as an example of early exposure, indicating that the term is acquired naturally in domestic settings.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, this finding supports Holmes’ (2013) assertion that language is learned and reinforced through everyday social interaction. The consistent use of “odol” within family environments contributes to its normalization and strengthens its status as a generic term rather than a brand-specific label.

Perceived Naturalness and Linguistic Efficiency

Many respondents described “odol” as sounding more natural, practical, and familiar than “pasta gigi.” The preference for “odol” was often justified by its shorter form and ease of pronunciation. In contrast, “pasta gigi” was perceived as more formal, technical, or instructional.

This preference reflects the principle of linguistic economy, where speakers favor forms that require less effort while still conveying meaning effectively. From a pragmatic standpoint, “odol” functions efficiently as a shared lexical item that requires no further explanation among interlocutors who share the same cultural and linguistic background.

Attitudes Toward the Impact of Genericide

When asked about the impact of using brand names as generic terms, respondents expressed mixed attitudes. Some viewed the phenomenon positively, describing it as a natural part of language development. Others considered it potentially negative, particularly in relation to brand identity or formal language standards. However, most respondents emphasized that context determines appropriateness, suggesting that generic usage is acceptable in informal communication but less suitable in formal settings.

This finding reinforces Fairclough’s (1995) view that language practices are shaped by social norms and situational contexts. The use of “odol” illustrates how speakers strategically adapt language to fit communicative needs without consciously reflecting on linguistic theory or branding implications.

Discussion of Genericide as a Linguistic Phenomenon

Overall, the findings confirm that the use of “odol” as a generic term for toothpaste represents a clear case of genericide in Indonesian daily discourse. Semantically, the word has undergone a shift from a proper noun to a common noun. Sociolinguistically, this shift is maintained through habit, intergenerational transmission, and shared cultural knowledge.

The data suggest that genericide is not merely a linguistic deviation but a socially motivated process rooted in everyday communication practices. The dominance of the Odol brand in earlier periods, combined with repeated domestic use, has allowed the term to become deeply embedded in collective linguistic memory. This supports the argument that economic history and social interaction jointly contribute to long-term semantic change.

Thus, the phenomenon of “odol” demonstrates how language absorbs commercial elements and transforms them into culturally neutral vocabulary, highlighting the dynamic relationship between language, society, and consumer culture.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the use of “odol” as a generic term for toothpaste in Indonesian daily discourse is a clear example of genericide. Semantically, the word has undergone broadening from a specific brand name to a general category label. Sociolinguistically, its widespread use is sustained through habit, intergenerational transmission, and linguistic efficiency.

The findings highlight the close relationship between language and social practice, showing how commercial terms can become deeply embedded in everyday vocabulary. This research contributes to the study of semantic change and sociolinguistics by providing an Indonesian case study of brand genericization.

Future research may expand this investigation to other genericized brand names in Indonesian or compare genericide processes across different languages and cultures. Such studies would further illuminate the role of consumer culture in shaping linguistic evolution.

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