CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Many people are familiar with weight loss product advertisements because they frequently appear in almost all kinds of media forms: magazines, newspapers, radio, television, and Internet websites. The advertisements have successfully persuaded prospective consumers to spend their money on the advertised products although the products can be ineffective or may endanger their health. However, these consumers, who may have different reasons for purchasing the weight loss product, in fact have the same purpose: they want the easiest way to lose weight. In this thesis, these prospective consumers are classified into two types: the first consists of people who need to control their body weight to stay healthy or to be healthier, whereas the second is made up of people, mostly women, who want to reduce their weight to look more attractive.

The first type of consumers, who want to be healthier, may have heard about the danger of obesity, which according to World Health Organization (WHO), is "abnormal or excessive fat accumulation that may impair health." In

addition, obesity is related to the level of Body Mass Index (BMI). If the level of BMI of a person is equal to or greater than 25, he/she is just called overweight, while a person with the level of BMI equal to or greater than 30 is called obese ("Obesity and Overweight"). Information about the danger of obesity can make people anxious and think that obesity is a disease. In fact, obesity is not a disease but it can lead people to many serious health problems, such as heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, arthritis, gallbladder disorder, and some kinds of cancer. Therefore, it is understandable that people desire very much to become slimmer.

The second type of consumers, mostly women dreaming to look slimmer and more attractive, are perhaps tempted by the weight loss product advertisements showing the pictures of slim, young, beautiful women with some persuasive words luring the readers. Apparently, whatever reason they have, those consumers are not willing to follow the WHO's guidance for losing weight in reasonable ways, namely by "doing regular physical activities and making a healthier choice of food" ("Obesity and Overweight"). For people in industry, the negative attitude toward doing the right but painful ways of losing weight becomes the motivation to produce more weight loss products that promise quick, easy results and to promote the products through advertisements, especially in the Internet.

Internet websites have become the favorite media form to advertise products. Compared with advertising in off-line media, on-line advertising has more advantages, such as wider coverage, lower cost, and faster and easier transaction ("10 Advantages of Online Advertising"). In March 2011, Internet

World Stats stated that the biggest part (44.0%) of the Internet users in the world was in Asia, which suggests that Asian people have more possibility to be influenced by on-line advertising than people in other parts of the world. Meanwhile, many Asian people, including Indonesians, are unaware of the advertiser's strategies of promoting the product by using false claims and weasel words in the advertisements. With this in my mind, I choose to analyze the language of the weight loss product advertisements in the Internet.

This kind of analysis is necessary because most of the advertisements claim that their products will cause rapid, easy weight loss but they do not truly warrant the results. Consumers, who spend a big amount of money on the products, may be deceived if they are not able to understand the real message sent by the advertisers. In order to reveal the truth behind the advertising language, I try to identify and classify the false claims and explain the words with unclear meanings in the advertisements.

This thesis, entitled "False Claims and Weasel Words in On-line Advertisements of Weight Loss Products," uses the theory of George L. Blackburn. He has classified the deceiving claims in weight loss product advertisements into nine types. In addition, to evaluate the advertisers' real message behind the bluffing words in the data, the analysis uses the theory of weasel words, which is included in the doublespeak theory by William Lutz. Weasel words, or "advertising doublespeak," are words that "appear to say one thing when in fact they say the opposite or nothing at all" (Lutz 85). In the field of Linguistics, this study belongs to Pragmatics, which is the study of the speaker's meaning.

The focus of the study is on words showing the characteristics of false claims and weasel words. The data are the language used in the data sources, which are weight loss product advertisements collected from Internet websites. Studies on the use of weasel words in advertisements have been done several times by students of the English Department in Maranatha Christian University but weasel words in weight loss product advertisements have never been analyzed. Moreover, Blackburn's theory of false claims has never been used in previous students' theses.

This study is significant because it can be used to help English speaking people understand the real message in the weight loss product advertisements, and it is useful for English learners, especially in Indonesia, to be aware of language manipulation in advertisements that persuade or even deceive consumers to buy products with unwarranted quality.

Words: 869

Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study is formulated as follows:

1. Which words in the data of weight loss product advertisements show false claims?

2. What weasel words are used in the advertisements?

3. What is the advertiser's purpose of using the weasel words?

Purpose of the Study

This study has the following purposes:

1. To identify the words in the data that show false claims.

2. To identify the weasel words used in the data.

3. To reveal the advertiser's purpose of using the weasel words.

Method of Research

To conduct the study, first I learned the theories of advertising language from several sources. Then I collected information and theories that will support the language analysis. After that, I collected some weight loss product advertisements from the Internet and analyzed the language by using the theories of False Claims (Blackburn) and Weasel Words (Lutz). Finally, I reported the results in this thesis.

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis consists of four chapters. Chapter One presents the Introduction, which contains the Background of the Study, Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, Method of Research, and Organization of the Thesis. Chapter Two puts forward the Theoretical Framework. The next chapter, Chapter Three, contains the analysis of false claims and weasel words in the data of weight loss product advertisements. This thesis ends with the conclusion in Chapter Four, which is followed by the Bibliography.