CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

This thesis has presented the analysis of false claims and weasel words in six on-line advertisements of weight loss products, namely PROACTOL, FULFILL PLUS, SLIMKICK, LI-DA, ACAIMAX CLEANSE, and CAPSIPLEX. The theory of false claims belongs to George L. Blackburn, whereas the theory of weasel words is taken from William Lutz's book entitled *Doublespeak*.

From the analysis it is found that all the ads in the data have used false claims and weasel words. These two methods are used to make the ads sound convincing so that consumers will purchase and consume the products. However, the promises presented in the ads should not be regarded as always true because if the products were truly guaranteed, the ads would have provided scientific data authorized by a formal medical institution and would not have used false claims and weasel words to impress consumers.

In the data of this thesis, the nine of Blackburn's false claims have been used 15 times, but the most frequently used false claims are **natural & safe claims** (4 times), **scientific claim** (2 times), and **lose weight without exercise/diet claim** (2 times). These claims are the most effective to attract consumers because generally people prefer a safe and easy weight loss program to one that requires a longer time and makes use of dubious ingredients.

A natural claim is purposively designed to attract consumers who prefer products that have natural ingredients and think that natural substances are always safe to consume. Therefore, **natural & safe claims** are used to convince them that the advertised product is safe to consume so that they will feel confident to buy the product. Unfortunately, however, some natural ingredients are not safe to consume. *Ephedrine*, for instance, is harmful for the human heart and it can result in serious organ injuries for some people (Blackburn 20). *Cerbera manghas* can affect cardiac work, whereas some mushrooms are found to be poisonous ("*Buah Bintaro, Buah Beracun yang Berguna*).─Scientific claim is made to make consumers believe that the product they are going to consume is safe because the product has been researched to prove its legitimacy. Lastly, the claim of losing significant weight without exercise or diet must have been created to attract either busy people who have limited time to do physical exercise or people who like eating a lot but have no strong will to leave this habit. This claim can make consumers be dazzled with the idea of losing weight without effort, which may lead them to buy the product.

Some false claims occur only once in the data; they are *rapid weight loss*, *before/after*, *customer's testimonial*, *permanent weight loss claim*, and *no more failure*. All these claims are also helpful to advertise the weight loss products but when compared to *natural claim, scientific claim and lose weight without exercise/diet*, it is apparent that they are less often used. The only claim that does not occur in the data is *money-back guarantee claim*. In my opinion, many companies would feel reluctant to make this claim because they know that to lose substantial weight, one needs a long term process while it is potential that the weight will be gained back. With this knowledge, the companies realize that they cannot promise consumers a guarantee let alone money-back guarantee.

False claims are used in ads to mislead consumers by giving dishonest promises whereas weasel words, such as *help, new*, *improved, fast, act* and *like magic*, have a different function. Weasel words are generally words that do not have an exact meaning so that they may seem to say something but they really do not. In the data, some weasel words are also used to strengthen certain false claims, for instance *help* on page 21 of this thesis. Some others, namely, *virtually*, *like*, *improved, act, work*, which also belong to Lutz's weasel words, are not found in the data. In my opinion, this fact is due to the type of the advertised product. In the advertisements of many other products, those weasel words are easily found.

Two weasel words, namely *new* and *help/assist* are found to be the most frequently used in the six ads. Both weasel words are used to convince consumers that the advertised products are worth buying, although they are not. The word *new* is used in the ad to convince consumers that the product is different from any

previous product; nevertheless, the advertiser does not show or explain the changes made to the product. The ad persuades consumers to think that the product has been an innovation in the weight loss product industry and it promises a successful result. In this case, the word *new* is a weasel word as it makes the ad seem to claim something while in fact it claims nothing.

The other weasel word that most frequently appears in the data is *help/ assist*, which occurs, for example, in data 3: *help boost your weight loss*. By using the word *help,* the ad does not mean to solve consumers' weight problem or eliminate their fat. The word is used just to support the dramatic result of the word related to it or placed after it, namely *boost*, which leads consumers to forget the word *help/assist* and focus on the effect of *boost your weight loss* only. Critical consumers will realize that the word *help* should be interpreted as "help to a certain degree," which can be so limited that the effect is not significant.

In the findings, there are also two unfinished words, namely the word *more* in *SlimKick can help your body burn more calories* in the third data and the word *better* in *increase energy and feel better* in the fifth data. The advertiser intentionally leaves those sentences unfinished and lets consumers make their own claim by finishing the sentence according to their own unrealistic thought. As can be seen in the third data, the word *more* is used to bring an idea of the calorie amount that can be burned by this product. However, without finishing the comparison, the consumers will not know "it burns *more calories* than what product?"

In the fifth data, the word *better* is also made unfinished so that consumers do not know "feel better than which situation?" Thus, after reading the claim *increase energy and feel better,* consumers may think that this product will make them feel better because it increases their energy. This possibility will enable the advertiser to promote their product without having to promise anything even though consumers may see many promises in the unfinished sentence.

On the whole, I arrive at a conclusion that both the false claims and the weasel words are designed to mislead consumers and to convince them that the advertised product is effective; therefore, the selling of the product will be boosted. These designed methods are commonly used because many prospective consumers will only be attracted to buy a product if the ad claims that the product is effective and worth buying, even if the claim is false.

By understanding the style of the advertising language, consumers will be more careful in buying weight loss products. They will understand the hidden meaning of the false claims and the weasel words so that they will not buy an unworthy product, which could not only make them feel disappointed but could also harm their health. Consequently, understanding the use of false claims and weasel words in English ads is also important for English learners in Indonesia to make them more aware of the real message behind the advertising language. Therefore, teachers are encouraged to include this topic in their teaching material to make their students more critical.

Words: 1,274