UNDERSTANDING COLOURISM THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA DISCOURSE (TWITTER) AMONG MALAYSIANS

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UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA

2021

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by

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**Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

February 2021

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CDA   Critical Discourse Analysis

CMD   Computer-Mediated-Discourse

DHA   Discourse-Historical Approach

SCA   Sociocognitive Approach

RT   Representation Theory

TA   Thematic Analysis

UVR   Ultra Violet Radiation

PENELITIAN DISKRIMINASI WARNA KULIT MELALUI WACANA

MEDIA SOSIAL (TWITTER) DALAM KALANGAN WARGA MALAYSIA

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini digarap untuk meneliti perihal diskriminasi warna kulit di Malaysia menerusi wacana berhubung warna kulit yang terbit dalam media sosial. Diskriminasi warna kulit pada asasnya merujuk prejudis atau diskriminasi terhadap seseorang berlandaskan warna kulit. Tesis ini merungkai tindakan berunsur diskriminasi warna kulit yang hadir dalam kalangan masyarakat dengan mengkaji strategi wacana dan peranti linguistik yang digunakan dalam wacana digital mereka. Untuk mencapat matlamat ini, kerangka kerja teoritis yang menggabungkan pendekatan Wacana Berbantukan Komputer dan Pendekatan Wacana Bersejarah diterapkan dalam kajian ini. Untuk mengukuhkan interpretasi wacana, analisis dalam makalah ini disokong dengan Pendekatan Sosiokognitif dan Teori Representasi. Kaedah penyusunan pemaparan data diadaptasi daripada Analisis Tematik. Pembentukan data diperoleh melalui kajian lapangan di dunia maya, diikuti dengan kaedah pensampelan mudah di sebuah media sosial, iaitu Twitter. Kajian kualitatif ini merungkai ideologi tentang warna kulit melalui pembinaan dan penggunaan bahasa dalam wacana mereka. Dapatan kajian ini membuktikan bahawa diskriminasi warna kulit sememangnya ada dalam masyarakat Malaysia. Sebilangan tema telah tampil melalui wacana mereka, antaranya tema kecantikan, keyakinan diri, pemutihan kulit, dan bias gender. Wacana mereka dituturkan melalui beberapa strategi, misalnya nominasi, predikasi, dan argumentasi, serta beberapa peranti linguistik lain seperti deiksis, retorik, dan kata kerja. Beberapa strategi

argumentasi yang digunakan dalam wacana mereka tertumpu kepada beberapa topik hujahan seperti topik perubahan, topik gender, dan topik diskriminasi. Perspektif pelaku sosial pula dikenal pasti berlandaskan tujuan komunikasi dalam talian mereka, dan beberapa perspektif telah dikenal pasti, iaitu pendiskriminasi warna kulit, pengkritik, dan penggalak pemutihan kulit. Kajian ini diwawasankan untuk menyumbang kepada pemahaman konsep warna kulit dalam kalangan warga Malaysia melalui penggunaan bahasa mereka dalam dunia digital, di samping mengupas isu diskriminasi warna kulit yang sedia ada di negara ini.

UNDERSTANDING COLOURISM THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA DISCOURSE (TWITTER) AMONG MALAYSIANS

ABSTRACT

This research is designed to study the pervasiveness of colourism in Malaysia through discourses on the subject of skin colour that subsist on social media. Colourism is essentially defined as a prejudice or discrimination based on skin colour. Principally, this thesis discovers the commonly subtle act of colourism in the society by concentrating on the discursive strategies and linguistic devices implemented in their digital discourse. To accomplish this, a theoretical framework composed of Computer-Mediated Discourse and Discourse-Historical Approach is formulated. To strengthen the interpretation of discourse, the analysis is supported by Sociocognitive Approach and Representation Theory. A method of organising the presentation of data is adapted from the construction of Thematic Analysis. The composition of data is achieved by conducting a virtual fieldwork, followed by a convenience sampling method of data collection performed on a social media site called Twitter. This is a qualitative research that reveals the underlying ideology through the construction of language in the discourse of skin colour. The findings from this study suggests that colourism is evidently present in Malaysia. A number of themes arise from their discourse about skin colour, predominantly on the subject of beauty, self-esteem, skin bleaching, and gender bias. Their discourse is realised through discursive strategies such as nomination, predication, and argumentation, along with constructive linguistic devices such as deixis, rhetoric, and verbs of feelings. Several argumentative strategies employed in

their discourse reveals a number of concerning topoi in regard to skin colour, such as the topoi of change, topoi of gender, and topoi of discrimination. The perspectivisation of social actors in the study is constructed upon the purpose of their online communication, which results to several significant perspectives, such as colourphobic, critics, and the promoters of skin bleaching. This study is envisioned to contribute to the understanding of the conceptualisation of skin colour among Malaysians by recognising their ways of constructing their digital communication, as well acknowledging the prevalence of colourism in this country.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Philosopher Immanuel Kant in his work Critique of Judgement [1790 in Ginsborg (2005)] acknowledged that the judgement of beauty is not an "aesthetic" but an "aesthetically grounded logical judgement". In the world we live today, skin colour is dejectedly one of the grounded judgements for beauty.

Skin colour has long been a concern of the world. It is part of a social construct, often described with race (Smedley and Smedley, 2005). Throughout history, humanity has favoured beauty and privilege, with skin colour being one of the critical precedents. European, white aesthetics including the colour of eyes, length, and straightness of hair, a sharper or narrower nose, and thinner lips are somehow defined as beautiful (Hunter, 2007). The ideology that light skin equates beauty was not constructed overnight; it is through the years of human civilisation that shaped the world to give credence into it; and the spread of ideologies are made through language. As asserted by Van Dijk (2006): "people acquire and express their ideologies largely by text or talk". It is arguable to say that there are no rules by which someone can be compelled to judge that something is beautiful (Kant in Ginsborg, 2019), however, the judgement on skin colour have caused more means to be affected, including social acceptance, self-acceptance, and even career opportunities are to be prejudiced by an individual's

physical attractiveness. Although it is believed that the standards of beauty are arbitrarily variable, lighter skin is somewhat seemed to be more beautiful, therefore more privileged, and this may affect one's life chances significantly (Rondilla and Spickard, 2007).

Several cases that involve unfair treatment upon people of colour were seen happening in the United States, such as the death of Trayvon Martin, a young male African American high school student who was shot by a neighbourhood watch coordinator in 2012 (Robertson and Schwartz, 2012). Recently in March 2020, a black female medical technician named Breonna Taylor was shot eight times at her own house by the police (Willingham, 2020). Taylor's family had filed a wrongful death lawsuit two months after her killing. In May 2020, a 46-year-old black man named George Floyd was killed in a police brutality case. The police who were a white man kept his knee on Floyd's neck for eight minutes and 46 seconds, causing his death (Hill et al., 2020). These cases are examples of how skin colour is not just colour, but also a means of mistreatment upon another human being.
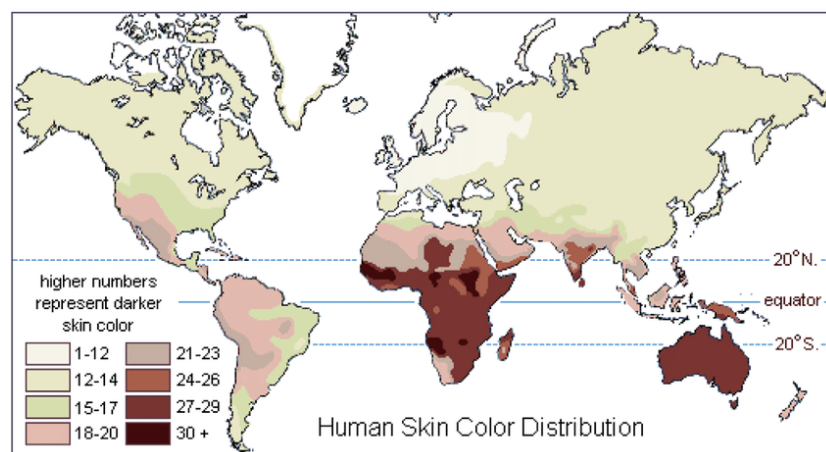
Figure 1.1: Global skin colour distribution of native populations (Dimasi et al., 2011)

A majority of the world population have lighter skin tone, as seen on the traditional skin colour distribution in Figure 1.1. The map was created by an Italian geographer, Renato Biasutti and it was based on the equatorial proximity. However, scientists argue that we do not know when skin colour is likely to have evolved, with multiple human migrations from Africa and large-scale genetic interchange over the last 500 centuries, and the exact mechanisms of skin colour selection - whether it involves Vitamin D sensitivity or ultraviolet radiation - remains controversial (Barsh, 2003). Genetically, skin colour is mainly determined by the factors such as the presence of melanin globules, a type of pigment in the epidermis. Melanin content, melanin composition, and the size of melanosomes in the human epidermis vary considerably (Thong et al., 2003). Other non-genetic factors affecting skin colours are environmental factors, such as the exposure to sunlight and the production of high UVR. Scientifically, the differences in UVR have induced darker skin for people near the equator and lighter skin for people at higher latitude (Barsh, 2003). Higher amount of melanin is produced for the skin in low latitude regions that led to darker skin color, and it is meant to protect the skin in order for it to survive in its environment (Yadufashije et al., 2017).

Located in a close proximity to the equator - Malaysia, a multicultural country with people from different backgrounds, consists of people with various skin colours. Here, the main conventional ethnic division consists of Malay, Chinese, and Indian (Hirchsman, 1987) with a variety of other ethnicities such as the Kadazandusun from Sabah and Iban from Sarawak (Department of Information Malaysia, 2016). According to (Blumenbach et al., 1865), the Malays are described to be tawny-coloured, which is an orange-brown or yellowish-brown colour. Meanwhile, the Chinese diaspora are known to have fairer skin feature and they also value the fairness of skin, however, Tan

and Stephen (2019) discovered that in Malaysia, the Malaysian Chinese have preferences towards a redder and yellower skin tone. The Malaysian Indians, whose origin are from India, a country populated by darker-skinned people especially at the south (Barnett and Hutton, 2016) are generalised to have a darker complexion. These backgrounds, although not necessarily, are some of the many factors that results in the variety of skin tones among Malaysians.

Linguistically, there are various ways for Malaysians to describe skin colour. For example, there are phrases in Malay - the national language of Malaysia, such as *kuning langsat* (yellowish-fair) to refer to a medium-toned skin and *hitam manis* (dark and sweet) in reference to a darker skin tone (PRPM, 2020). In 1954, a song was written by R. Azmi, a Malaysian singer to show admiration towards girls with a *hitam manis* complexion. Today, it is observed that people are admiring fairness, and having darker skin feels like a problem, as revealed by a prior observation made to the present study:

"Aku kulit gelap. Bg surat confession dkt crush. Crush reply 'muka mcm bontot kuali, ada hati nak suka aku'.aku naik bus kwn sapa aku 'hai botol kicap'. Disappointed my self esteem hilang, forever. Apa salah aku kulit gelap?"

"I have dark skin. When I gave a confession letter to my crush, he/she replied, "your face is like the pan's bottom, you don't deserve to have feelings for me". When I got on the bus, my friend greeted me with "hi, soy sauce bottle". Disappointed. My self-esteem is gone forever. Is it wrong to be dark?

(Twitter, 19 February 2019, 3:57PM)

Shown above is a sample of posting by a social media user, expressing feelings

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in regard to their skin colour and the reflection of treatments they receive from their surrounding. Such experience of treatment is closely related to colourism. Colourism is the process of discrimination that privileges light-skinned people of colour over their dark-skinned counterparts (Hunter 2005). Majority of people think that skin colour discrimination is usually a 'black or Latino problem', when it is actually practiced by both whites and people of colour (Hunter, 2007), and by "people of colour", the multicultural people in Malaysia are not exclusive. On this basis, the current study is predetermined to explore the people's discourse surrounding the subject of skin colour and to discuss the severity of colourism in Malaysia based on the reproduction of such discourse on social media.

1.2 Problem Statements and Research Gaps

In the past, the traditional mass media and the beauty industry had shaped the world into thinking that the ideal beauty standard is the Eurocentric beauty, where an "ideal beautiful person" should have fair skin, straight hair, and round eyes (Uzogara and Jackson, 2016). The one-way communication that occurred in the past through print media such as billboards, magazines, newspapers; and electronic media such as television and film have constructed the image of an ideal physical appearance, where light-skinned Caucasian models, especially in advertising beauty products are used to manoeuvre the desire of non-white women to achieve lighter skin (Mills et. al, 2017; Hussein, 2010). Hall (2010) believes that this is the result of colonisation, where the Western ideals are disseminated. In some Asian countries like India, the demand for a fairer complexion has grown too obsessively, where there is even a social stigma against those with darker skin (Abraham, 2011), while In China, there is an idiom that

goes "one white covers three flaws" (Fitzgerald, 2014) which clearly intensified the importance of having light skin in the Asian diaspora.

With today's growing use of the internet and social media, people are more open to share what they do, what they feel, and what they think. People use social media mainly for social interaction, to seek for information, to pass their time, and for some, to express their opinion (Whiting and Williams, 2013). As opposed to the one-way communication manifested through traditional media, social media administered a capacious room for people to participate in the interaction. In expressing their opinion, there are several ways to do it, such as liking postings and photos, commenting on updates, and sharing comments on other people's postings. When posting their opinion and thoughts, social media users are concurrently communicating to a certain 'imagined audience'. Imagined audience, whether abstract or target, is one of the reasons social media users post (or not post) something on their platforms (Litt and Hargittai, 2016).

People are taking advantage of social media to be in unification by voicing out the issues that people without authorities would not previously have the chance to execute. In 2011, the government of Saudi Arabia, the country which previously banned women from driving is facing resistance when the people in the country are campaigning to encourage women to start driving through a social media movement called "Women2Drive" (Aljarallah, 2017). In 2012, a hashtag called "BlackLivesMatter" emerged as a response to the releasing of George Zimmerman, a Florida Neighbourhood Watch coordinator who shot and killed 17-year-old Trayvon Martin out of racism (Schwartz et al., 2013). Social media is veritably a powerful medium for users

to spread awareness and have dialogues about issues that raises their concern. On this basis, the current study is committing on the power of social media to gain insight on people's thoughts and opinion on the subject of skin colour.

A number of previous researches regarding skin colour highlighted the African dark-skinned community, especially in America (Daniel, 2016; Hochschild and Weaver, 2007; Wilder, 2015). Other discussions on this issue also involves the Latinx community, Indian community (Abraham, 2011; Uzogara, 2018), and other minor communities in the South Asia. Studies on the discourse of skin colour had partaken the topics of skin colour in advertisements and commercials (Mehta, 2019; Mukherjee, 2019) and the discourse of skin colour in the media (Boylorn et al., 2014; Hussein, 2010). Scholarships in the Malaysian context had previously studied the issue of race and the stereotypes that emerged on the grounds of skin colour (Chong, 2009; Goh et al., 2009). However, after an extensive literature search and reviews, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, the exploration on the people's discourse in respect to skin colour in the Malaysian context had never been conducted.

Language is a tool for carrying out joint intellectual activity, a distinctive human inheritance designed to serve the practical and social needs of individuals and communities (Mercer, 2002). Today, in the era of Web 2.0, communication is made easier through multiple platforms of social media. We live in a world with narrative, where we share with others of what happened in our lives, what we read in a book, or what we saw in a film (Ochs, 2011). There is more freedom for people to discuss about a variety of subjects on social media, and eventually, more room for researchers to gain authentic data in a way that could not be obtained through traditional media.

It is thought-provoking to discover how people use their language to share their opinion and ideas, as there are a variety of social factors that governs people's choice of terms, such as the occasion, social status, and race (Wardhaugh, 2011). In a linguistics study, attention shall be given to the specific discourse and related texts in relation to the discursive strategies and practices. Therefore, it is the interest of this research to investigate how social media users construct their language when discussing skin colour. Particularly, the purpose of this study is to investigate the discursive strategies and linguistic devices practiced by Malaysian social media users in their discourse subjected to the topic of skin colour.

1.3 Research Objectives and Research Questions

A general presentation of the research questions in this study is: 'When Malaysians talk about skin colour on social media, what do they actually talk about? How do they use language to represent their discourse?' Accordingly, the present study attempts to contribute to an insightful understanding of the aforementioned queries.

1.3.1 Research Objectives

The research objectives enumerated below explain the main purpose and direction of the present study.

1. To identify the discursive strategies and linguistic devices that contribute to the positive or negative construction of skin colour on social media.

2. To determine the arguments and topoi employed in the discourse of skin colour on social media.

3. To establish the perspectivisation of social actors in the discourse of skin colour on social media.

1.3.2 Research Questions

Research questions listed below explain the questions that the present study would seek the answers to.

1. What are the discursive strategies and linguistic devices that contribute to the positive or negative construction of skin colour on social media?

2. What arguments and topoi are involved in the discourse of skin colour on social media?

3. What are the perspectivisation of social actors in the discourse of skin colour on social media?

1.4 Theoretical Framework

This study integrates several theories and approaches to form a theoretical framework where a variety of concepts and perspectives are employed to guide the research process, i.e. the collection of data, interpretation of data, and presentation of data. In

this section, the concept and perspectives are briefly discussed, while further elaboration is made in Chapter 2. Displayed in the Figure 1.2 is the theoretical framework of this thesis, designed in pursuit of achieving the research objectives.
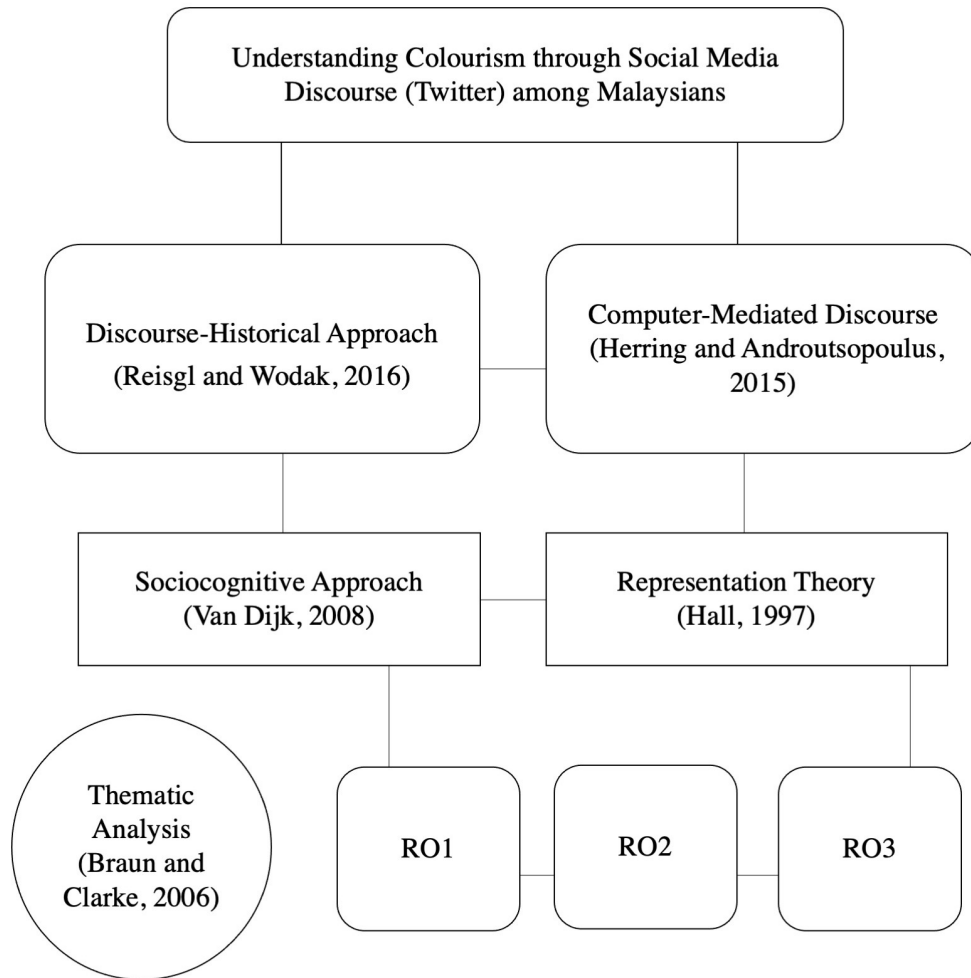
Figure 1.2: Theoretical Framework

The interrelationship between these theories and approaches firmly guide the development of this thesis. It is best to understand the interrelationship by recognising the characterisation of each theory and approach, and the rational of it being integrated

into this research. The following subsections elaborate the theoretical framework in detail, while simultaneously outlining the primary key terminologies operated in this research.

1.4.1 Discourse-Historical Approach

Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) focuses on the systematic analysis of context and its dialectical relationship to meaning-making, and it involves the integration of a large quantity of available knowledge about the historical sources and the background of 'the social and political fields in which discursive events' are embedded (Wodak, 2001a). In the present study, DHA is primarily integrated into the data analysis, where the data is diagnosed and interpreted as a discourse from the DHA viewpoint. The three primary indispensable concepts of DHA are critique, power, and ideology (an extensive explication about this is made in Chapter 2). Drawing on DHA, this study is paying attention to the discursive strategies and linguistic devices employed in the discourse:

1.4.1(a) Discursive Strategies

Discursive strategies are often used to elaborate on the techniques used by social actors in the construction of their discourse. As mentioned by Wodak (2001a), a strategy is "a more or less accurate and more or less intentional plans". In DHA, some of the prominent strategies are nomination or referential, predication, perspectivisation, argumentation, and intensification or mitigation. Further description about these strategies is made in Chapter 2.

1.4.1(b) Linguistic Devices

Linguistic devices are essentially any mode, medium, or technique used by language users to realise their meaning of utterance. It is often associated with the use of rhetorical figures in the language (e.g., metaphor, personification, simile) (Toman and Miller, 2014), as well as actions that complement the language, such as hesitations, rising intonation, tag questions, and intensifiers (Holmes, 1990). A more detailed explanation about linguistic devices is made in Chapter 2.

Uniquely, in this thesis, the discourse at study is not specifically produced by one individual or institution with one side of power and one particular dissemination of ideology; but rather produced by many individuals with the possibility of multiple ideologies. The power at hand is subsumed in the social media itself, as an accessible mode of communication with a wide range of potential for powerful communicative events to occur, hence its interrelationship with Computer-Mediated Discourse.

1.4.2 Computer-Mediated Discourse

Computer-Mediated Discourse (CMD) is the communication produced when human beings interact with one another by transmitting messages via networked computers, where "computers" are defined broadly to include any digital communication device (Herring, 2015). The study of computer-mediated discourse is a specialisation within the broader study of computer-mediated communication, distinguished by its focus on language and language use in computer networked environments, and by its use of methods in discourse analysis to address that focus (Herring, 2019). Social media is categorised as Discourse 2.0, adapted from Web 2.0, where it refers to web-

based platforms that incorporate user-generated content and social interaction (Herring, 2015). Discourse 2.0 is is about the new environment, such as new content (e.g., status updates), new context (e.g., geolocation), and new affordances (e.g., "friending" and "tagging"). Some new emergent of discourse phenomena in CMD includes conversational video exchange and multimodal conversation, where multimodal means that they may include images and sounds. In the present study, CMD is primarily integrated into the data collection method, where the data is collected from a social media platform called Twitter.

1.4.2(a) Social Media

Social media is often loosely defined as "user-generated content utilising internet based publishing technologies distinct from traditional print and broadcast media" (Terry, 2009). Social media is uniquely distinct from traditional media such as the television, newspapers, radio, and magazines. However, the key to defining social media is through the phrase "user-generated", which allows users with internet access to share and collaborate. Twitter is one of the platforms with a high number of users.

1.4.2(b) Twitter

Twitter is a microblogging service created in 2006 in California, United States, where it allows users to post character-constrained messages via a range of technologies such as mobile phone, instant messaging clients, and the web (Zappavigna, 2011). The messages are called "tweets", and users are allowed to post up to 280 characters per posting. Twitter may be accessed through multiple electronic devices, such as smartphones, laptops, and tablets. Users of Twitter are also sometimes called as

tweeters. In the present study, tweeters are also addressed as "tweet authors". More explanation on Twitter and the rationale it is selected as the social media platform for this study is made in Chapter 2.

1.4.3 Sociocognitive Approach

Sociocognitive Approach (SCA) acts as the supporting approach for the present study, primarily in the discourse interpretation process. SCA, developed by Teun A. van Dijk (Van Dijk, 2008,1,1) focuses on the cognitive aspects of discourse production and comprehension. It examines social structures of power through the analysis of the relations between discourse and cognition, where cognition is the necessary interface that links discourse as language use and social interaction with social situations and social structures (Van Dijk, 2008). Van Dijk (2014) asserted that discourses function through a cognitive interface, namely the mental representations of language users as individuals and as social members. The principles in SCA firmly suits the present study, as it is the objective of SCA to connect the cognitive interface between discourse and society. Skin colour is personal, owned by every living individual, each with their own cognition. Hence, since SCA is interested in what the speaker has in mind and how it is decoded by the receiver, this approach is appropriate to be integrated into the present study, especially in the process of data interpretation.

1.4.4 Representation Theory

Adjacently, Representation Theory (RT) as proposed by Hall (1997) is also embedded as the supporting approach in the discourse interpretation process. This theory denotes that representation is the production of the meaning of the concepts in our mind

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through language (Hall, 1997). Representation means using language to say something meaningful about, or to represent the world meaningfully to other people, where it is an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture. The relationship between language and representation is evident, as the link between concepts and language enables us to refer to either the real world of objects, people or events, or to imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people, or events. Detailed elaboration regarding this theory is made in Chapter 2.

1.4.5 Thematic Analysis

Thematic Analysis (TA) is a basic, practical, and widely used method for capturing patterns or themes in qualitative data analysis Braun and Clarke (2006). In other words, it is an approach for extraction of meanings and concepts from data that includes pinpointing, examining, and recording patterns or themes. In the present study, the strategies of thematic analysis are employed upon the presentation of data, which results in different classifications of the same data set. The objective of presenting the data categorically according to their themes is to achieve a clearer view of the 'reality', particularly in answering the research question of this study – which is to understand the content of the discourse on the subject of skin colour (on top of reviewing the linguistical characteristics employed in the discourse). In this study, TA is used in complement with other grounded theories and approaches as discussed earlier. Further elaboration about this method is presented in Chapter 2.

1.5 Additional Key Terminologies

1.5.1 Skin Colour and Dark Skin

The skin is a visible organ in the human body that covers the human being for an average of 2 square meters. Humans are born with their skin, and the colour of the skin are primarily determined by genetic factors such as the presence of melanin globules, a type of pigment in the epidermis. Melanin content, melanin composition, and the size of melanosomes in the human epidermis vary considerably (Thong et al., 2003). Grimes (2006) defined dark skin as a commonly used phrase to describe people of colour. Other terms used to describe darker skin types include ethnic skin, brown skin, and pigmented skin; where pigmented skin includes shades of tan, olive, brown, and black (Grimes, 2006). Skin colour categories according to the Fitzpatrick Skin Type denotes six different skin types, skin color, and its reaction to sun exposure which ranges from very fair to very dark. Among all six types, four grades are for Caucasians and two grades are for brown and black-skinned persons. Later, brown skin was divided into 3 groups; skin type IV for light brown, skin type V for brown skin and skin type VI for dark brown/ black skin, which subsumed as what is referred to as 'dark skin'.

1.5.2 Colourism

Colourism is defined as "the process of discrimination that privileges light-skinned people of colour over their dark-skinned counterparts (Hunter, 2007), in which it is internalised between the people of colour themselves. Colourism is also acknowledged as the tendency to associate light skin people with positive virtues and dark skin people with negativity. In other words, colourism refers to any act of discrimination that is

portrayed on the basis of skin colour or the act of attributing negativity upon dark skin. Accordingly, this thesis aims to understand colourism that is believed to be present in the community of Malaysians, although this issue is rarely spoken of.

1.5.3 Argumentation and Topoi

From the viewpoint of DHA, argumentation deals with how the speakers justify or question the 'truth and normative rightness' of their claims or other speakers' claims (Wodak and Meyer, 2009). Within argumentation strategy, Wodak (2006) explained topoi as parts of argumentation which belong to the obligatory, either explicit or inferable premises. Richardson and Wodak (2009) conceptualised topoi as the generalised key ideas from which specific statements or arguments can be generated. Similarly, from the standpoint of DHA, a topoi is more content-related and the key is to establish the internal logic of the argument through form (topic) and content (warrants) (Wodak, 2015). However, the conceptualisation of arguments and topoi are in DHA had been claimed to be adjusted from the supposed concepts by some scholars. Further discussion on this subject is made in Chapter 2.

1.5.4 Perspectivisation

From the point of view of DHA, perspectivisation may simply be referred to as the interpretation upon the placement of one's opinion. Wodak (2011) explained that perspectivation, framing, or discourse representation are means of which speakers express their involvement in discourse and position their point of view in the reporting, description, narration or quotation of relevant events or utterances that justify their claim. In this thesis, the form of utterance at study is the social media posting called

tweets. Perspectivisation is concerned with how speakers position themselves and express their involvement (or distance) from the particular issues. In the present study, the positioning of social actors is interpreted by the researcher based on the context of their tweets, specifically on how they construct their opinion about dark skin and where do they position themselves in such discourse. Further elaboration regarding perspectivisation is presented in Chapter 2.

1.5.5 Social Actors

The concept of social actors is essential in critical discourse analysis. Social actors are defined by Van Leeuwen et al. (2008) as a set of participants in certain roles (principally those of instigator, agent, affected, or beneficiary). By the linguistic act of specification, social actors are referred to as individuals (Torkington and Ribeiro, 2019). Accordingly, in the study of discourse, social actors may be defined as the individuals that produce and reproduce language. In the present study, social actors are characterised upon the producer of the text (i.e. tweet authors) and the characters reproduced in the text (i.e. social actors that are present in the text).

1.6 Significance of Study

The primary purpose of a Critical Discourse Analysis is to unmask the ideology permeated in language use (Wodak and Meyer, 2009). The findings of this study are envisioned to contribute to the understanding of the conceptualisation of skin colour among Malaysians by recognising their ways of constructing their communication. The significance of this research lays in the usefulness of its findings not only to the language academics, but more importantly to sociological understanding of skin colour

and its ideology. By acknowledging the current perception and ideology of skin colour and eventually, the substantiality of colourism in the community, the damaging effects of colourism may have the chance to be reversed. Therefore, the observation presented in this study is aspired to be the steppingstone into improving communication between people and reconstructing the dissemination of ideology.

1.7 Scope and Limitations

The large data available on the internet is providing an exuberant possibility for researchers to conduct numerous types of studies. Be that as it may, the present study is focusing at a modest scope in the discourse by limiting the subject of skin colour to a focused topic of "dark skin". This limitation is applied due to the background of fair skin being superior towards dark skin (Hunter, 2007), therefore it prevails as an issue to be explored. Fairclough and Wodak (1997) stressed that the concept of ideology and power are among the most crucial items in the analysis of discourse; thus, it is coherence to explore on the ideology of fairness as 'better' and the effects it had caused by powerful entities towards the less powerful ones.

The selected discourse of skin colour in the data set is delivered by Malaysians in the Malay language. The selection of Malay as the language at study is compre-hensively associated with the status of Malay as the national language in Malaysia; with a significant number of speakers that had increased from 60.5 million in 2015 to 80.3 millions in 2018 (Simons and Fennig, 2017). Essentially, the collection of data is assigned to the Malay language keyword in regard to the topic of *kulit gelap* (dark skin). The specification is made upon "dark skin" as the selected keyword for the data,

as the underlying objective of this research is to investigate the relationship between skin colour discourse and colourism, and comprehensively, colourism is commonly experience by darker-skinned individuals (Bodenhorn and Ruebeck, 2007; Paul, 2016a; Phoenix, 2014). However, it should be noted that even though the search keyword is in the Malay language, the use of code-mixing in the tweets are expected, due to the influence and status of English as the second language and the language of learning in the country (Thirusanku and Yunus, 2014).

The social media platform selected for this case study is Twitter; a microblogging platform created in 2006 that allows its users to write and receive posts known as tweets (Crystal, 2011). Users are allowed to write up to 280 characters, which made it expeditious and instantaneous. On top of tweets, Twitter is also a multi-modal platform; the multimodality of Twitter such as emojis, animated GIFs (graphics interchange formats), photos, and videos is a compelling material for various research interests. However, the current research is exclusively centered towards the use of written language in the discourse, therefore the analysis will solely consider the written texts. The use of multimodality that appear on the data (if any) will be used as guidance and supporting tools in the direction of analysing the data, however it will not be the subject of analysis.

1.8 Thesis Outline

This first chapter of the thesis introduced the key elements of the study. The research questions, research objectives, and the theoretical framework is presented. In addition, the key terminologies that guided the research is addressed. In Chapter 2, the overview of the history colourism and explaining how history and culture contributed to the construction of skin colour is explained in the context of the world, Asia, and Malaysia's multicultural community. This chapter also overviews scholarly discussions and literature reviews with focus on relevant past research. In Chapter 3, the research methodology is outlined. The criteria and justification for data collection and data analysis is thoroughly discussed. The sampling of data (tweets) is introduced, and the method of analysis is explained. Chapter 4 highlights the results and findings of the textual analysis presented in views of positive or negative sentiments of skin colour along with the discursive and linguistical construction, the perspectivisation and categorisation of social actors, and the interrelation between the discourse and the underpinning technology of social media. This chapter compares and contrasts the findings to the research of other scholars as discussed in the literature review chapter, as well as connecting the findings with a broader interdisciplinary scope. Finally, Chapter 5 presents the conclusion, together with the challenges, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

1.9 Conclusion

Conclusively, this research is designed to study the discourse of Malaysian social media users on the subject of skin colour. By integrating Computer-Mediated Discourse and Discourse-Historical Approach, supported with Sociocognitive Theory and

Representation Approach, this research is directed to discover the underlying ideology and how language is constructed in the representation of such ideology. Additionally, by understanding the discourse, this study aims to reveal the current situation of colourism in Malaysia.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEWS

2.1 Introduction

To understand how and why the discourse of skin colour is developing the way it is, it is necessary to explore the related contexts that have contributed to the issue. The first part of this chapter provides thematic literature review inclusive of historical overviews on the notion of skin colour and the ways it has been perceived, by addressing scholarly studies and relevant literature. Meanwhile, the second part of this chapter focuses on the scaffolding and composition of this thesis, primarily on the theories and approaches integrated in the research.

2.2 Skin Colour

The skin is the largest organ in the human anatomy. An average person's skin covers an area of 2 square meters. Humans are born with their skin, and the colour of the skin are primarily determined by genetic inheritance. Skin colour is mainly determined by the genetic factors such as the presence of melanin globules, a type of pigment in the epidermis. Melanin content, melanin composition, and the size of melanosomes in the human epidermis vary considerably (Thong et al., 2003). Other non-genetic factors affecting skin colours are environmental factors, such as the exposure to sunlight and the production of high UVR. Scientifically, the differences in UVR have driven to darker skin for people near the equator and lighter skin for people at higher latitude (Barsh, 2003). Higher amount of melanin are produced for the skin in low latitude

regions that led to darker skin color, and it is meant to protect the skin in order for it to survive in its environment (Yadufashije et al., 2017).

Discrimination as defined by Cambridge Dictionary is "treating a person or a particular group of people differently, especially in a worse way from the way in which you treat other people, because of their skin colour, sex, sexuality, and etc". Race and skin colour discrimination - although not precisely similar, are rather closely related to each other. The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission Race described that discrimination involves treating someone negatively because that person is of a certain race or because of the personal characteristics associated with race, including upon their phenotypes such as hair texture, skin colour, or a particular facial feature. Meanwhile, colour discrimination specifically involves treating someone differently on the basis of skin colour. Additionally, race or colour discrimination included treating someone unfavourably because of the intimate association (such as being married) to a person of a certain race or colour. In the present study, the use of 'skin colour discrimination' in reference to the aforementioned definition is established, and its usage is made interchangeably with the term 'colourism'.

2.3 Skin Colour, Colourism, and Racism

Colourism evolved differently in different parts of the world, however, the root of this discrimination started as early as the 17th century, where slavery was practiced by the American colonies and as of the 18th century, around six million Africans were brought into the country as slaves (Murdock, 2019). Europeans and white Americans created racial hierarchies to justify their subhuman treatment of the people of

color they colonized and enslaved (Hunter, 2013). The idea of white supremacy has bigger roots in slavery, where slaves with fairer complexions are often treated better than slaves with darker complexions. White supremacy is the process of domination which includes structures, systems, decisions, and policies imposed on people of colour by white hegemonies (Gabriel, 2007), and it is believed to be the building block of colourism. Among all the slaves, lighter-skinned slaves were given indoor works and more manageable tasks as opposed to their dark-skinned counterparts. Such preference later led to the view where light-skinned people are more privileged; and this view had since derived globally.

The story of skin colour prejudice in America lasted for quite a number of generations. In 1705, the state of Virginia introduced the 'one drop rule' that is to declare a person with even a 'drop' of African ancestry to be black (Gabriel, 2007). In 1948 to the early 1990's, the Apartheid, which was a racial segregation system was implemented in South Africa (Giliomee and Schlemmer, 1993). In the 20th century, a brown paper bag test was widely implied. According to the test, only those with a skin colour that matches or appear lighter than a brown paper bag was allowed admission or membership privileges to a certain social institution like churches, fraternities, or sororities (Kerr, 2006). Although those implementations have ended long in the years and no longer serve as a legitimate practice, a recent poll in 2018 conducted by NBC News revealed that a big number of Americans believe that racism is still a major problem in the US. According to the poll, 64 percent of respondents agree that racism remains a major issue in the society, while another 45 percent believe that race relations are getting worse (Ziabari and Houston, 2019).