



STUDENTS’ PERSPECTIVES ON ‘MAGRIB’ AS A SKIN COLOR METAPHOR IN INDONESIAN CULTURE: A LINGUISTIC STUDY

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Abstract

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Abstract

This study examines the metaphorical use of "Magrib"—a term associated with Islamic prayer time—to describe dark skin in Indonesian culture, exploring its psychological, social, and institutional impacts. Grounded in conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and stigma frameworks (Goffman, 1963), the research employed qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis, with 30 dark-skinned university students in North Sumatra. Findings revealed that 36.67% of participants faced discrimination linked to the term, while 30% reported internalized stigma, undermining self-esteem. However, 20% reframed "Magrib" as a symbol of empowerment, demonstrating resilience. Critically, 13.33% highlighted institutional failures to address such bias, underscoring the need for policy reforms. The study situates "Magrib" within global colorism discourses (Hall, 2020) but emphasizes its unique cultural resonance in Indonesia, advocating for educational interventions, diversity training, and inclusive media representation. This research contributes to broader efforts to combat language-based stigma and promote inclusivity in multicultural societies by linking linguistic analysis to systemic inequities.

Keywords: Term ‘Magrib’; Skin Color Metaphor; Stigma; A Linguistic Study.

INTRODUCTION

Language is a means of communication that is used to transfer information, ideas, and feelings from one person to another (Bonvillain, 2019). Language is also a system of communication based upon words and the combination of words into sentences. By using language, people can develop their knowledge and know about something, (Kurniati, 2016). Language is a profound tool of human thought, capable of both reflecting and shaping societal values. In Indonesia, the term "Magrib," commonly associated with the Islamic prayer time after sunset, has taken on a metaphorical meaning to describe individuals with dark skin (Maxwell et al., 2015). This transformation illustrates how language can perpetuate societal biases, with metaphors serving as tools for embedding cultural stereotypes into everyday discourse (Martin & Fozdar, 2022). One element that needs to be considered in linguistic studies is how metaphor functions as an identity. Using words or word combinations that are not intended to convey their literal meaning is an example of a metaphor (Rakova, 2023). Because of this, we can deduce that metaphor possesses a linguistic identity and functions as a point of view (Heni Subagiharti, 2023). According to Kozub-Karkut (2024), metaphors are not merely linguistic devices but cognitive frameworks that influence how people perceive and engage with the world. They add that metaphors are not just decorative flourishes but fundamental to understanding abstract concepts by mapping them onto our concrete, embodied experiences. While earlier studies have highlighted the role of metaphors in shaping social

realities, contemporary research extends this understanding by exploring the intersection of language, power, and discrimination.

Metaphors are deeply entrenched in cultural and social contexts, making their analysis essential for uncovering the implicit power dynamics in language use (Kövecses, 2021). The metaphorical use of "Magrib" reveals a broader phenomenon of colorism—an internalized bias favoring lighter skin tones, rooted in colonial histories and perpetuated through cultural norms (Adams et al., 2016). Recent studies have shown that colorism is a form of same-group discrimination based on skin tone that allows more advantages for lighter-skinned individuals who self-identify as Black than for darker-skinned individuals who self-identify as Black. Colorism is a legacy based on slavery and racism that has contributed to the racial identities of individuals who self-identify as Black, (Gardner-Kennedy, 2023). Colorism is identified as an ethnic taboo in which those who have suffered may be unaware of its effects. Colorism affects individuals' opportunities, social relationships, and psychological well-being, often exacerbating existing inequalities, (Hall, 2020). The stigma associated with dark skin can lead to social exclusion, as theorized by Goffman (2019) in his foundational work on stigma (Eliasson et al., 2021). However, more recent research, such as that by Williams (2020), highlights the compounded effects of stigma on mental health, particularly among young adults in educational settings. In Indonesian culture, metaphors involving skin color are deeply tied to historical and social narratives. Terms like "putih" (white) often connote purity and beauty, while "gelap" (dark) is associated with negativity. The term "Magrib," as a metaphor for dark skin, not only reinforces these dichotomies but also marginalizes individuals who deviate from perceived aesthetic norms (Malloy-Diniz et al., n.d.).

This phenomenon parallels linguistic patterns observed globally, where terms related to darkness often carry pejorative connotations. The impact of such metaphors extends beyond individual experiences to societal perceptions, shaping collective attitudes toward race and identity. The biases that can emerge are as numerous as the stereotypes and can affect judgments about many groups: women, people who are overweight, people with disabilities, people of particular religions, and, of course, people of various races, (Worden et al., 2020). Language reinforces biases, subtly influencing behaviors and decision-making processes. Metaphorical language can either challenge or perpetuate systemic inequalities, depending on its usage and reception. In educational settings, the use of terms like "Magrib" can create environments of exclusion and psychological distress for dark-skinned students. Individuals facing such stigmas often experience reduced self-esteem and academic disengagement. Stigma is often discussed alongside mental illness; constructs such as race, ethnicity, and sexuality can also cause individuals to adopt feelings of stigma within themselves (McCurdy, 2023). Overall, perceived and self-stigmas have the potential to affect students' psychological well-being negatively, willingness to seek treatment, cocurricular experiences, and academic performance, (Guarneri et al., 2019). The intersectionality of these experiences—where language, race, and education converge—underscores the urgent need to address the implications of metaphorical language in shaping social and institutional dynamics (Kövecses, 2021).

This study situates itself within this critical discourse, exploring the metaphorical use of "Magrib" among dark-skinned university students in North Sumatra. By analyzing this term's psychological and social impacts, the research aims to contribute to a broader understanding of how language influences identity and social inclusion. Additionally, it seeks to inform language policies and educational practices, advocating for more inclusive and equitable environments.

This study advances existing research on colorism and linguistic stigma by specifically examining the metaphorical use of "Magrib"—a term rooted in Indonesian religious and cultural contexts—to describe dark skin, a focus not deeply explored in prior studies (Gardner-

Kennedy, 2023; (Hall, 2020). While prior work has analyzed colorism globally (Hall et al., 2020) and the psychological impacts of stigma, Goffman (2019)(Williams et al., 2021), this research uniquely investigates how a locally significant metaphor perpetuates systemic biases in Indonesia, bridging linguistic theory Kozub-Karkut (2024); Kövecses (2021) with empirical qualitative data on lived experiences. Unlike broader studies on skin-tone discrimination, this study highlights the intersection of language, religion, and colorism in an educational setting. It reveals institutional gaps (13.33% of participants cited a lack of support) and resilience strategies (20% reclaimed the term), offering context-specific insights for policy and advocacy.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the metaphorical use of "Magrib" and its impacts on dark-skinned university students. A descriptive and exploratory approach was chosen to capture the depth and nuance of participants' experiences.

Participants

The study involved 30 dark-skinned students from a university in North Sumatra, selected through purposive sampling. Participants met the following criteria:

- Self-identification as dark-skinned.
- Enrollment in undergraduate programs.
- Willingness to participate in interviews and share personal experiences.

Data Collection Techniques

- Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews lasting 10-20 minutes focused on participants' experiences with the term "Magrib." Questions were designed to elicit detailed responses, with follow-up questions to probe emerging themes.

- Observations

The researcher observed the contextual use of "Magrib" within university settings, documenting instances of its application and the reactions it elicited.

- Field Notes

Non-verbal cues, emotional responses, and situational factors were recorded to complement interview data.

Data Analysis

Two analytical frameworks were employed:

1. Conceptual Metaphor Analysis

This method identified metaphorical patterns in participants' responses, linking them to broader linguistic and cultural contexts.

2. Thematic Analysis

Using Braun and Clarke's approach, data were coded and organized into themes such as social exclusion, psychological impacts, and coping mechanisms. Reflexive thematic analysis is an easily accessible and theoretically flexible interpretative approach to qualitative data analysis that facilitates identifying and analyzing patterns or themes in a given data set (Cooper et al., 2012).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained, and participants provided informed consent. Anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained throughout the research process.

Finding

a. Thematic Analysis Report

Introduction

This report presents a thematic analysis based on the research findings regarding the term 'Magrib' as a metaphor for dark skin in Indonesian culture.

Step 1: Familiarization with Data

After reviewing and understanding the research data, several key issues emerged from the participants' experiences regarding the term 'Magrib' as a metaphor for dark skin.

Step 2: Initial Coding

Table 1. Initial Code

Initial Code	Description
Negative Connotation	The term 'Magrib' carries negative meanings reflecting societal biases toward dark skin.
Social Exclusion	Participants experienced being ignored or treated differently in social and academic situations.
Internal Stigma	Participants internalized the negative label, affecting their self-confidence and self-esteem.
Emotional Resilience	Some individuals showed resilience by reframing negative narratives into positive ones.
Lack of Institutional Support	Criticism of educational institutions for lacking inclusive policies or programs to address discrimination.
Cultural Parallels	The phenomenon of negative connotations related to skin color metaphors is observed globally, not just in Indonesian culture.

Step 3: Searching for Themes

Table 2. Main Theme

Main Theme	Related Codes
Negative Impacts of Language	Negative Connotation, Social Exclusion, Internal Stigma
Positive Response and Resilience	Emotional Resilience
Institutional Role	Lack of Institutional Support
Global Perspective	Cultural Parallels

Step 4: Reviewing Themes

Upon reviewing the themes, connections were found between the use of 'Magrib' as a metaphor and its social-psychological impacts on individuals and global implications.

Step 5: Defining and Naming Themes

Table 3. Defining and Naming Themes

Main Theme	Theme Description
Negative Impacts of Language	Describes how the term 'Magrib' triggers negative connotations, social exclusion, and internal stigma among participants.
Positive Response and Resilience	Highlights individuals' ability to cope with stigma by transforming narratives into tools of self-empowerment.
Institutional Role	Emphasizes the lack of inclusive policies and the critical role of educational institutions in addressing language-based discrimination.
Global Perspective	This phenomenon is connected to similar patterns in other cultures, highlighting global biases in language based on skin color metaphors.

Step 6: Reporting Students' Responses

Table 4. Reporting Students' Responses

Main Theme	Supporting Codes	Example Data
Negative Impacts of Language	Negative Connotation, Social Exclusion	When someone calls me 'Magrib,' it's not just about my skin tone; it feels like they're associating me with something negative.
Negative Impacts of Language	Internal Stigma	I started to avoid looking in mirrors. Whenever someone called me 'Magrib,' it felt like they pointed out a flaw I could not change.
Positive Response and Resilience	Emotional Resilience	I decided to make the term 'Magrib' empowering. I tell people that my skin is beautiful, and I challenge them to see it that way, too.
Institutional Role	Lack of Institutional Support	Our university does not do enough to address these issues. There are no policies or programs to promote inclusivity.
Global Perspective	Cultural Parallels	Globally, metaphors related to color often reinforce social hierarchies.

Result Table

Table 5. Category

Category	Number of Students	Percentage
Negative Connotation and Social Exclusion	11	36.67%
Internal Stigma	9	30.00%
Emotional Resilience	6	20.00%
Lack of Institutional Support	4	13.33%

The Metaphorical Meaning of "Magrib" and Its Cultural Significance

Participants described the term "Magrib" as deeply rooted in cultural and societal connotations, often imbued with negative implications. One participant stated: "When someone calls me 'Magrib,' it's not just about my skin tone, it feels like they're associating me with something negative, something undesirable."



This view underscores the metaphor's dual role: it describes physical traits while embedding societal biases. In Indonesian culture, "Magrib" represents transition and darkness, both carrying implicit negative associations. Kozub-Karkut's (2024) conceptual metaphor theory explains how such linguistic expressions reflect and reinforce societal values. Similarly, Kövecses (2017) emphasizes that metaphors are not random but closely tied to cultural frameworks, which explains why "Magrib" resonates as a stigmatizing term.

Globally, metaphors related to color often reinforce social hierarchies. For example, in Western contexts, "darkness" is frequently associated with danger or evil, while "light" signifies purity or virtue, (Hall, 2020). These parallels highlight the universal impact of metaphorical language in shaping social perceptions.

Social Exclusion and Marginalization

Thematic analysis revealed that using "Magrib" often leads to social exclusion. Participants frequently recounted being overlooked or alienated in group settings. One participant shared:

"In group discussions, my comments were ignored, but they received attention when someone else said the same thing. It made me feel invisible."



This exclusion aligns with Goffman (2019) stigma theory posits that individuals marked by socially undesirable traits are often marginalized. Participants also reported differential treatment in academic settings. For instance, another participant explained:

"Professors would hesitate to call on me in class. It felt like they assumed I wouldn't have anything valuable to contribute."

These experiences demonstrate how linguistic stigmatization translates into broader social inequalities, affecting individuals' access to opportunities and social networks.

Psychological Impacts: Internalized Stigma and Emotional Distress

The psychological effects of being labeled "Magrib" were profound. Several participants described feelings of shame, sadness, and anger. One participant stated:



"I started to avoid looking in mirrors. Every time someone called me 'Magrib,' it felt like they were pointing out a flaw I couldn't change."

This internalized stigma, as described by Link (2011), represents a psychological process where individuals accept negative societal labels as part of their self-concept. Prolonged exposure to such language led to self-doubt and diminished self-esteem among participants.

Another participant shared:

"I became withdrawn because I felt like no matter how hard I tried, people would only see my skin color."



This aligns with findings by Williams et al. (2021), who highlight the link between stigma and mental health, particularly among marginalized groups. Participants' accounts also

revealed instances of anxiety and depression, underscoring the term's far-reaching psychological toll.

Coping Mechanisms: Resilience and Advocacy

Despite the challenges, some participants demonstrated remarkable resilience. One participant explained:

"I decided to turn the term 'Magrib' into something empowering. I tell people that my skin is beautiful, and I challenge them to see it that way too."



This proactive approach reflects emotional resilience and a desire to shift societal narratives. Research by Major (2019) supports the role of resilience in mitigating the impacts of stigma, particularly when combined with strong social support.

Other participants took an educational approach, using conversations to address biases. For example, one shared:

"I told my classmates that the term 'Magrib' is hurtful, and I explained why. Some of them apologized and said they hadn't thought about it that way before."



These efforts highlight the importance of fostering dialogue to challenge discriminatory norms and promote understanding.

Institutional and Societal Responsibilities

Participants identified educational institutions as key sites for perpetuating or challenging stigmatizing language. One participant noted:

"Our university doesn't do enough to address these issues. There are no policies or programs to promote inclusivity."

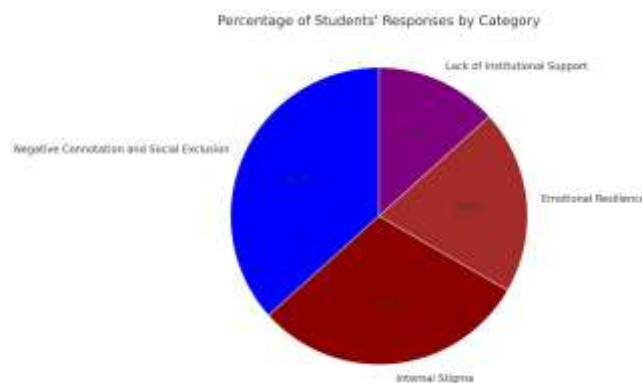
This criticism underscores the need for institutional interventions. Educational settings are critical in shaping societal attitudes, making them ideal platforms for promoting inclusive language practices.

Policy-level changes, such as diversity training and anti-discrimination campaigns, could mitigate the impacts of stigmatizing terms like "Magrib." Participants also emphasized the importance of representation in media and curricula to normalize diversity and challenge colorism.

Global Comparisons: Parallels and Lessons

The metaphorical use of "Magrib" parallels global issues of colorism and linguistic discrimination. In Western contexts, terms like "dark" and "black" often carry negative connotations, perpetuating biases (Eberhardt et al., 2018). Similarly, studies in African and South Asian contexts reveal how linguistic hierarchies favor lighter skin tones, affecting societal perceptions and opportunities (Hall, 2020). These global patterns highlight the universality of language's role in reinforcing social hierarchies. However, they also provide examples of successful interventions, such as public awareness campaigns and policy reforms, which could inform strategies in Indonesia.

Discussion



The findings of this study illuminate the profound social, psychological, and cultural implications of the metaphorical use of the term "Magrib" to describe dark skin in Indonesian society. This metaphor, rooted in cultural and linguistic frameworks, reflects entrenched biases that perpetuate colorism and social exclusion. The results revealed that 36.67% of participants associated the term with negative connotations, experiencing exclusion and differential treatment in academic and social settings. For instance, participants reported instances where their contributions were ignored or dismissed, which aligns with Goffman's theory of stigma, wherein individuals marked by socially undesirable traits face marginalization. Such experiences are not isolated to Indonesian culture but mirror global linguistic patterns, where terms related to darkness often carry pejorative meanings. The psychological toll of this linguistic bias is significant, with 30% of participants internalizing stigma, leading to diminished self-esteem and feelings of inferiority. One respondent shared how being labeled "Magrib" discouraged them from engaging with peers and even led to avoidance of mirrors, perceiving their skin tone as a flaw. These responses resonate with Link and Phelan's conceptualization of stigma as a process that individuals internalize, affecting their self-concept and mental well-being.

Despite these challenges, 20% of participants displayed emotional resilience, reframing the term "Magrib" into an empowering narrative. This reflects an active effort to challenge societal norms and shift perceptions about skin tone. For example, some participants embraced the term by redefining its meaning in their personal lives and advocating for conversations that promote understanding and inclusivity among peers. Such acts of agency align with research emphasizing the role of resilience in mitigating stigma's effects, highlighting the potential for individuals to initiate cultural change from within. However, the lack of institutional support remains a glaring issue, with 13.33% of participants criticizing educational settings for failing to address discrimination rooted in linguistic biases. Many participants noted the absence of inclusive policies or programs designed to combat language-based stigma, such as awareness campaigns or diversity training. This gap underscores the critical role educational institutions play in either perpetuating or dismantling discriminatory norms. The findings also situate "Magrib" within a broader cultural and global context of colorism. In Indonesia, terms such as "putih" (white) and "gelap" (dark) carry implicit value judgments that shape societal attitudes toward beauty and identity.

Globally, similar linguistic patterns have been observed, where metaphors related to darkness often reinforce social hierarchies. For instance, in Western cultures, "dark" is frequently associated with negativity, danger, or evil, while "light" represents purity and virtue. Such parallels emphasize the universality of language as a tool for maintaining social inequalities. Nevertheless, global interventions such as inclusive media representation, public awareness campaigns, and educational reforms offer valuable lessons that Indonesia could adopt to address the harmful implications of metaphorical language. Participants in this study

also highlighted the need for systemic changes, calling for diversity training, revised curricula, and increased representation of diverse skin tones in educational and media platforms. These measures could help challenge deep-seated biases and foster a culture of inclusivity and respect for diversity. The metaphorical use of "Magrib," as evidenced in this research, underscores language's powerful role in shaping identity and societal dynamics. Beyond its immediate psychological impacts, the term influences social interactions, educational opportunities, and broader cultural perceptions, underscoring the urgency for collective action. Addressing these issues requires a multi-faceted approach, combining individual resilience with institutional reforms and cultural shifts to dismantle linguistic hierarchies and create more equitable spaces for all members of society. Through education, policy changes, and advocacy, Indonesia can move toward a future where metaphorical language uplifts rather than marginalizes, fostering a society that celebrates diversity and inclusivity.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the harmful psychological, social, and cultural effects of using the term "Magrib" as a metaphor for dark skin, revealing that 36.67% of participants faced discrimination, while 30% experienced internalized stigma, underscoring language's role in reinforcing inequality. However, 20% demonstrated resilience by reclaiming the narrative, suggesting potential for empowerment through education and advocacy. Despite this, 13.33% cited a lack of institutional support, emphasizing the need for systemic reforms, such as inclusive media representation, anti-discrimination policies, and diversity education, to combat colorism in Indonesia and globally. Future research should explore media and educational interventions through mixed-method, cross-cultural comparisons to identify effective strategies for fostering inclusivity and dismantling discriminatory language.

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