

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter consists of several subchapters that covers a general understanding towards the study. The first subchapter provides the background of the study that deals with the rationale and reason of the importance in conducting this study. The second outlines the research question, by formulating the questions or problems that need to be answered. The following subchapter is the objective of the study that presents the aims or purposes to achieve in response to the previous subchapter. Furthermore, the fourth discusses the significance of the study that relates to this study's contributions both theoretically and practically. Finally, the scope and limitation of the study that clarifies the boundaries of the data and focus of this study.

1.1 Background of the Study

In this digital era, the fast-paced evolution of digital technologies has transformed the landscape of education. Various digital platforms now provide seamless access to distance learning. *Preply*, *Superprof* and *Italki* are examples of online education platforms (Carneiro et al, 2023). These platforms have become tremendously popular as they provide personalized and various fields of courses including language learning. Different from the past, learning languages usually required students to come to an institution to take the course or even visit the country that uses the target language. However, today, it is easier to learn languages such as English, Mandarin, Korean, and Japanese through the internet.

One of the languages that has recently attracted widespread global interest is Korean. According to Jung (2015), this phenomenon is due to the influence of the Korean wave (Korean music, drama and food), especially from the 1990s onward that resulted in the dramatically increasing number of Korean language learners around the world. The spread of Korean music, dramas, and culture rapidly increases the number of people who want to learn Korean, including in Indonesia. This growing demand has encouraged many Korean language tutors to offer their teaching services through online learning platforms.

Today, a large number of qualified and certified Korean language tutors are available through online learning platforms. *Superprof.com* is one of online learning platforms that have become popular recently (Patria, 2021). The presence of a large number of Korean language tutors on *superprof.com* creates a highly competitive environment. Regarding marketing themselves, the tutor needs to display several information such as a good photo profile, personal introduction, education background or their areas of expertise, teaching style or method, affordable fee, and experiences in teaching in order to attract the prospective students. Those aspects aim to get students' attention and increase the credibility of the tutors. Beside those aspects, user-generated reviews or recommendations are one of the crucial aspects in boosting credibility.

Furthermore, the language on reviews and recommendations becomes crucial aspects in *superprof.com* since it gives evaluation to the Korean language tutors and represents or influences tutors' credibility and competency. Therefore, learners from different parts of the world now rely on online reviews and recommendations to select the most suitable and best tutors. As the obtained information from online reviews usually affect consumers' attitudes for decision making (Jiang & Benbasat, 2007; Ren & Gang, 2018). Additionally, in *superprof.com*, the term reviews refer to the evaluations given by the students that have booked several sessions or had a trial session with the tutors while recommendations can be given by everyone including colleagues, students, family, or friends whether they have or have not experienced any sessions with the tutors.

Moreover, since the reviews and recommendations are related to evaluative language, this study investigates in detail a specific linguistics framework known as appraisal theory proposed by Martin and White (2005). In addition, Martin and Rose (2007) and Oteíza (2017) state that this theory covers a way of categorizing interpersonal meaning and is organized evaluation in three categorizations of systems and one of the systems is the attitude system which deals with the expression of feelings, emotional reactions and judgements. Through the attitude system, evaluative language is enabled to be construed

specifically in the form of a person's emotions or feelings within an evaluative text. This system is divided into three subsystems or domains: affect, judgement and appreciation.

Affect refers to emotional reaction expressed by the reviewer, whether people feel happy or sad, confident or anxious, love or hate and like or dislike. For instance, “We enjoyed the element of surprise and were not disappointed by the food” (Linh & Hoa, 2024). The underlined clause is categorised as affect due to its emotional experience or reaction expressed by the reviewer.

Judgement concerns the evaluation based on ethical, behavioral or moral standards (Martin and White, 2005; Mirzaaghabeyk, 2022). For example, “If you leave Au Cheval disappointed because the food wasn’t uniformly great, it’s a sign you didn’t go in with the right expectations” (Linh & Hoa, 2024). The underlined phrase exemplifies the use of judgement in such online reviews because it deals with the evaluation of behavioral standards.

The last system is appreciation, it relates with the evaluation of objects or things, processes, or phenomena in terms of quality or value such as aesthetic or usefulness. As Martin and White (2005) state that an assessment of the quality of an object, event or phenomenon is categorized as appreciation. For instance, “The meat was grilled with wonderful flavor. The waitstaff delivered great service which raised the overall experience” (Linh & Hoa, 2024). The underlined phrase is an example of appreciation due to its evaluation of the meat.

Regarding the evaluations, this study is important and interesting because language plays a crucial role in constructing meaning specifically in such online discourses. As Ekawati and Puspitasari (2021) note, the language used on online reviews usually include writers’ feelings, perspectives and also personal experiences. These evaluative expressions not only describe what learners experience but also help shape how readers view tutors, which can influence potential learners when deciding which tutor to choose. Thus, this study focuses on the attitudinal system and is conducted in order to understand how these evaluative languages are used to construct meaning on *superprof.com* reviews and recommendations. The reason for the use of appraisal framework organized by

Martin and White (2005) is because it examines how language is used to construct evaluative and interpersonal meanings.

Since there are a large number of Korean language tutor profiles around the world on *superprof.com*, ten tutor profiles were selected because they appeared with a badge of at least ‘experienced teacher’. This requirement needs to be fulfilled due to its profile’s appearance priority from the search engine. For the detailed explanation, see chapter 3. Thus, the reviews and recommendations of these selected tutors’ profiles become an interesting object for this study in order to help the potential students in decision making.

Regarding the object of the study, several studies within the framework of appraisal systems applied to online reviews have been explored (Chaves et al., 2014; Ekawati & Puspitasari, 2021; Ho, 2017; Linh & Hoa, 2024; Purnamasari & Maulidia, 2017; Tian, 2013). Besides, studies that specifically examine online reviews and recommendations in educational platforms, particularly *Superprof.com*, remain limited. Therefore, this gap indicates that the present study is worth conducting, as it contributes novelty, specifically in the research focus.

1.2 Research Questions

According to the rationale or background of the study above, the research problems or questions are designed to guide the study. These questions are intended to investigate the attitudinal systems found on *superprof.com* reviews and recommendations. The details of the entire question formulated below:

1. What are the types of the attitudinal system expressed by the reviewer in *superprof.com* reviews or recommendations of Korean language tutors?
2. How is the attitudinal system realized in the *superprof.com* reviews and recommendations of Korean language tutors?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Referring to the formulation of the research problem above, the purposes or objectives in relation to each research question of this study is in below:

1. To identify the categories of attitudinal systems used by the reviewers in *superprof.com* reviews and recommendations of Korean language tutors.

2. To explain the realization strategies of each type of attitudinal system in *superprof.com* reviews and recommendations of Korean language tutors.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Referring to the purposes or aims above, this study also provided both theoretical and practical significance as in below.

Theoretically, it contributes to an online discourse analysis research within the framework of appraisal theory organized by Martin and White (2005) particularly in the context of online education platforms namely *superprof.com*. By applying the attitudinal system to online reviews and recommendations on *superprof.com*, it enriches the understanding of how evaluative language is used in user-generated reviews to express emotions, judgements, and appreciation. Additionally, it also provides insight on how the evaluative language is realized on *superprof.com* reviews and recommendations.

Practically, the study provides valuable insights for tutors, education platforms, and other researchers or readers. For tutors, it helps them understand how attitudinal language is expressed on online reviews and recommendations that can influence their positive and professional image or online reputation. For platforms in this case is *superprof.com*, the findings can lead to the development of feedback systems that capture more authentic and meaningful feedback from the students in order to increase the credibility as an online platform which provides good quality tutors to the students. Additionally, the output of this study also offers other researchers and readers a deeper understanding and insight of how evaluative language represents students' comments, satisfaction, emotional reactions, and realized toward online learning experiences on education related platforms such as *superprof.com*.

1.5 Scope and Limitation of the Study

The scope of this study is the appraisal theory proposed by Martin and White (2005) that is applied to online reviews and recommendations of *superprof.com*. However, the study only focuses on one aspect of appraisal theory,

specifically the attitudinal system. It does not include any other components of appraisal theory such as engagement and graduation. Moreover, this study is limited to *superprof.com* online reviews and recommendations of the 10 selected Korean language tutor profiles which only consists of English-written reviews and recommendations to maintain the consistency of the data. It merely also includes reviews and recommendations from *superprof.com* and may not be generalizable to any other online tutoring platforms. Moreover, since online reviews and recommendations vary in authenticity, length, and tone, interpretations are based solely on the textual evidence provided.