

# “YOU LOOK FAT IN RED”: FAT TALK IN THE WORKPLACE

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## ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Citizen sociolinguistics

Fat talk

Linguistic characteristic

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Article History:

Received: 30/03/2021

Accepted: 21/05/2021

Available Online:

31/05/2021

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## ABSTRACT

*In the Indonesian context, commenting on one's less adequate body size is considered normal. However, the effect it has on the person who is subjected to it is quite surprising. The fat talk phenomenon in the workplace is one example of fat talk case that remains under-researched. This research reflects the phenomenon of fat talk in the workplace viewed from a sociolinguistics viewpoint. In analyzing and gathering the evidence, this research uses a descriptive qualitative approach and citizen sociolinguistics. The data were obtained from the discovery made by citizen sociolinguists in the workplace. Based on Bulik's 12 types of fat talk, the results showed that the most frequent types are personalized and generic (24%), followed by compliment fishing and bullying (21%). The least used types of fat talk are comparative, joking, and fat-is-ugly. The results also showed that the fat talk's linguistic features were found to be linked to body parts, clothing, food, body health, appearance, weight, and context of appearance and height. Eventually, fat talk is a new language variation that has fulfilled a specific language purpose in the workplace.*

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## A. Introduction

A fat talk is a form of verbal communication that involves derogatory self-statements or self-disappearing body talk,<sup>1</sup> which concerns the physical image,<sup>2</sup>

weight, dietary strategies<sup>3</sup> that is appropriate and common in today's

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<sup>1</sup> Cindi L. SturtzSreetharan et al., "Fat Talk: A Citizen Sociolinguistic Approach," *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 23, no. 3 (2019): 263–83, <https://doi.org/10.1111/josl.12342>.

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<sup>2</sup> Jennifer B. Webb et al., "Mom, Quit Fat Talking—I'm Trying to Eat (Mindfully) Here!": Evaluating a Sociocultural Model of Family Fat Talk, Positive Body Image, and Mindful Eating in College Women," *Appetite* 126 (2018): 169–75, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2018.04.003>.

<sup>3</sup> Louise Ousley, Elizabeth D. Cordero, and Sabina White, "Fat Talk among College Students: How Undergraduates Communicate Regarding Food

culture and typically occurs in a peer group,<sup>4</sup> particularly among women,<sup>5</sup> However, fat talk also occurs among men.<sup>6</sup>

According to Kartawidjaja and Cordero, fat talk discussion is one factor, along with cultural and environmental factors influencing college women's perception of body dissatisfaction.<sup>7</sup> Thus, Stice,<sup>8</sup> Tylka,<sup>9</sup> and Dakanalis et al.,<sup>10</sup>

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and Body Weight, Shape & Appearance," *Eating Disorders* 16, no. 1 (2007): 73–84, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10640260701773546>.

<sup>4</sup> Danielle E. MacDonald et al., "The Family Fat Talk Questionnaire: Development and Psychometric Properties of a Measure of Fat Talk Behaviors within the Family Context," *Body Image* 12 (2015): 44–52, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2014.10.001>.

<sup>5</sup> Mimi Nichter and Nancy Vuckovic, "Fat Talk: Body Image among Adolescent Girls," in *Many Mirrors: Body Image and Social Relations*, ed. Nicole Sault (Rutgers: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 109–31, <https://arizona.pure.elsevier.com/en/publications/fat-talk-body-image-among-adolescent-girls>.

<sup>6</sup> Renee Engeln, Michael R. Sladek, and Heather Waldron, "Body Talk among College Men: Content, Correlates, and Effects," *Body Image* 10, no. 3 (2013): 300–308, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2013.02.001>.

<sup>7</sup> Jenae E. Kartawidjaja and Elizabeth D. Cordero, "Fat Talk and Body Dissatisfaction Among College Dancers," *Journal of Dance Education* 13, no. 4 (2013): 122–29, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15290824.2013.768767>.

<sup>8</sup> Eric Stice, "Risk and Maintenance Factors for Eating Pathology: A Meta-Analytic Review," *Psychological Bulletin* 128, no. 5 (2002): 825–48, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.128.5.825>.

<sup>9</sup> Tracy L. Tylka, "The Relation Between Body Dissatisfaction and Eating Disorder Symptomatology: An Analysis of Moderating Variables," *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 51, no. 2 (2004): 178–91, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.51.2.178>.

<sup>10</sup> Antonios Dakanalis et al., "Male Body Dissatisfaction and Eating Disorder Symptomatology: Moderating Variables among Men," *Journal of Health Psychology* 20, no. 1 (2015): 80–90, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359105313499198>.

stated that fat talk seems to be a significant predictor of body dissatisfaction, which is the accurate predictor of eating disorder behavior.

Fat talk is widespread, particularly among women. It is not shocking given the high priority attached to the physical appeal. Most people are concerned about their appearance and the image of others, particularly women whose bodies and relative attractiveness can be believed to reflect the whole self.<sup>11</sup> As a result, conversation among women about weight and body image eventually led to fat chat. However, based on recent research, fat talk is also growing among men today.<sup>12</sup> Out of a brief exchange of interaction between men, fat talk occurs, and it comes up naturally in a daily conversation. It can happen anywhere, throughout all ages and genders, based on the study done by SturtzSreetharan.<sup>13</sup>

The epidemic of fat talk also takes place in Indonesia. Soleman and Elindawati showed that the phenomena of body-shaming via social media were triggered by a normal and social order that shaped people's behaviors in everyday life.<sup>14</sup> According to the result of interviews

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<sup>11</sup> Kathrine D. Gapinski, Kelly D. Brownell, and Marianne LaFrance, "Body Objectification and 'Fat Talk': Effects on Emotion, Motivation, and Cognitive Performance," *Sex Roles* 48, no. 9 (2003): 377–88, <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1023516209973>.

<sup>12</sup> Michael R. Sladek, Rachel H. Salk, and Renee Engeln, "Negative Body Talk Measures for Asian, Latina(o), and White Women and Men: Measurement Equivalence and Associations with Ethnic-Racial Identity," *Body Image* 25 (2018): 66–77, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2018.02.005>.

<sup>13</sup> SturtzSreetharan et al., "Fat Talk," 263–83.

<sup>14</sup> Noviyanti Soleman and Rifki Elindawati, "Fourth Wave Feminism in Indonesia: Body-Shaming

by the Head of the Public Information Bureau of the Police Headquarters Public Relations Division, Brigadier General Dedi, he said that there were 966 cases of body shaming on social media in 2018.<sup>15</sup> The data showed a large number, and it should be addressed and became a concern. Thus, it can be concluded that Indonesian people have developed a body-shaming pattern in social life, and it has become standard practice to remark on someone else's looks. As a result, it distorted people's internal responses and made them aware of their bodies, contributing to a fat talk epidemic. In addition, a conversation featuring a body presence is more likely to give a rise to a fat talk phenomenon.

Cynthia Bulik, the director of the UNC Eating Disorders Program, categorized fat talk into 12 types,<sup>16</sup> namely:

#### 1. Generic Fat Talk

The first type of fat talk is the most common type, which often people hear or say about (e.g., "I don't like my thighs" and "I need to lose weight").

#### 2. Compliment-Fishing Fat Talk

When people are fishing for compliments or looking for the "but you're not fat" comment (e.g., "I look big wearing this dress").

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Through Social Media Phenomenon," *Journal of Islamic World and Politics* 3, no. 2 (2019): 588–604, <https://doi.org/10.18196/jiwp.3234>.

<sup>15</sup> Soleman and Elindawati. 588-604.

<sup>16</sup> Cynthia M. Bulik, *The Woman in the Mirror: How to Stop Confusing What You Look Like with Who You Are* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012). 174-180

#### 3. Comparative Fat Talk

This type of fat talk happens when people commiserate over their bodies as a group (e.g., "You think you are fat? Look at me!").

#### 4. Can't-Take-a-Compliment Fat Talk

This type usually happens when someone compliments other persons and that person cannot accept the praise because he or she is just not having it, having difficulties in believing the compliment, or thinking the compliment as a polite gesture (e.g., when someone gives a compliment and he or she responds with "No! I don't think I look like that at all").

#### 5. Competitive Fat Talk

According to Bulik, when someone cannot stop talking about what they eat or how much they exercise, then this type of fat talk emerged; people become covertly competitive with each other (e.g., "All I eat is salad and fruits for a day" and "I take Pilates every day now").

#### 6. Silent Fat Talk

Bulik explains this type occurs when someone goes out together with many other people, then he or she concentrates on what others are ordering instead of finding out what their appetite craves. Other people's decisions on the order menu guide him or her.

#### 7. Joking Fat Talk

In this type of fat talk, people tend to try to find humor in someone's size. Someone could say a joke about another person's weight or appearance or poke fun at yourself (e.g., from the book "They

better not stick me in the window-exit aisle, or else none of us will ever get out of this plane alive”).

#### 8. Stealth Fat Talk

Bulik explains this as a type of “fat talk in sheep’s clothes.” This happens when someone compliments or praises another person based on their weight; however, these compliments are anything but kind or flattering. Such compliments suggest that (1) something was wrong with you before, (2) weight loss is inherently appealing, and (3) someone’s health or happiness can be seen based on their size. For example, “You look amazing! Have you lost weight?.”

#### 9. Fat-Stigmatization Fat Talk

According to Bulik, this type of fat talk is directed toward fat people in general, including all prejudice against individuals of size (e.g., “I don’t want to have to pay for the extra material it takes to manufacture clothing in their size”).

#### 10. Fat-Is-Ugly Fat Talk

This type perpetuates the misconception that fat and attractive are oxymorons (e.g., “She got the look—such a shame she is big”).

#### 11. Personalized, Disrespectful Fat Talk

Bulik states that this type of talk tends to be targeted, personal, petty fat talk directed towards a specific person about their particular appearance aspect (e.g., “Do you really need to eat a dessert?”).

#### 12. Bullying Fat Talk

Bulik claimed that this type surpasses disrespect and goes over the

line to purposeful, hurtful, and power-seeking (e.g., “I can stand seeing you anymore. How someone could look like you?”).

Some researchers have previously discussed issues regarding fat talk. (Gapinski et al., 2003;<sup>17</sup> Ousley et al., 2007;<sup>18</sup> Kartawidjaja & Cordero, 2013;<sup>19</sup> Cavico et al., 2012;<sup>20</sup> Engeln et al., 2013;<sup>21</sup> Danakalis et al., 2015;<sup>22</sup> Webb et al., 2018;<sup>23</sup> SturtzSreetharan et al., 2019;<sup>24</sup> Agostini et al., 2019<sup>25</sup>) to name but a few. One of them is a previous study conducted by SturtzSreetharan *et al.* entitled *Fat Talk: A citizen Sociolinguistic Approach*.<sup>26</sup> It analyzes fat talk using a new method employing a citizen sociolinguistics approach in collecting the data because fat talk is a spontaneous conversation and is hardly accessible using conventional sociolinguistic approaches. Another previous study

<sup>17</sup> Gapinski, Brownell, and LaFrance, “Body Objectification and ‘Fat Talk.’” 377–88.

<sup>18</sup> Ousley, Cordero, and White, “Fat Talk among College Students.” 73–84

<sup>19</sup> Kartawidjaja and Cordero, “Fat Talk and Body Dissatisfaction Among College Dancers.” 122–29.

<sup>20</sup> Frank J. Cavico, Stephen C. Muffler, and Bahaudin G. Mujtaba, “Appearance Discrimination, Lookism and Lookphobia in the Workplace,” *Journal of Applied Business Research (JABR)* 28, no. 5 (2012): 791, <https://doi.org/10.19030/jabr.v28i5.7223>.

<sup>21</sup> Engeln, Sladek, and Waldron, “Body Talk among College Men.” 300-308.

<sup>22</sup> Dakanalis et al., “Male Body Dissatisfaction and Eating Disorder Symptomatology.” 80–90.

<sup>23</sup> Webb et al., “‘Mom, Quit Fat Talking—I’m Trying to Eat (Mindfully) Here!’”

<sup>24</sup> SturtzSreetharan et al., “Fat Talk,” 263–83.

<sup>25</sup> Gina Agostini et al., “Citizen Sociolinguistics: A New Method to Understand Fat Talk,” ed. Zhiqiang Cai, *PLoS ONE* 14, no. 5 (2019): e0217618, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0217618>.

<sup>26</sup> SturtzSreetharan et al., “Fat Talk,” 263–83.

related to fat talk was done by Agostini *et al.* entitled *Citizen Sociolinguistics: A New Method to Understand Fat Talk*.<sup>27</sup> This study aims to test a new technique, the citizen sociolinguistic approach, of collecting data on fat talk in a diverse field. The study's empirical results were examined in three areas: region diversity, gender bias, and age bias in data collection.

However, there are few researchers studied about the fat talk phenomenon from a sociolinguistic perspective conducted in Indonesian context. Additionally, both previous studies cannot analyze the linguistic characteristics of fat talk discussion between interlocutors engaged in fat talk. In this recent study, the researchers want to investigate the fat talk from a sociolinguistics perspective in certain workplaces. To fill the void from previous studies, the researchers examine the linguistic features of the fat talk debate in more detail to generalize the linguistic characteristics that contribute to fat talk.

This research focuses on generating the linguistics characteristics of fat talk in certain workplaces. According to Cavico and Mujtaba, appearance influences an employer's opinion about an employee's credentials; thus, it also affects a customer's perception of its services or products.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, appearance among workers is crucial, which fat talk discussion is highly possible. As mentioned before, women are more likely

engaged in fat talk discussion; therefore, women-dominant workplaces is precedence. However, it should be noted that the recent study is not focusing on gender bias. The researchers focused on talk among employees who work in service departments such as tellers, sales, and customer service; however, it does not rule out if other departments, such as the administration department, are also included in the study's observation. Based on an observation done by the researchers, the service department is the most likely where fat talk may happen because service department employees care more about their looks and appearance since they meet with customers more often.

This current research is expected to generate the theory regarding the linguistic characteristics leading to fat talk discussion and acknowledge the reader on how to identified specified linguistic characteristics address to fat talk so that people are aware of particular linguistic characteristics leading to fat talk discussion. Furthermore, this current research is expected able to describe the social context in which fat talk happens. Thus, this study aims at revealing the types of fat talk found in the workplace.

## **B. Method**

Descriptive qualitative research was used to investigate the linguistic characteristics of fat talk. Since fat talk is one of the social premises, a descriptive study was used to solve and improve or understand problems and practices through observation, analysis, and

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<sup>27</sup> Agostini *et al.*, "Citizen Sociolinguistics." 1-16

<sup>28</sup> Cavico, Muffler, and Mujtaba, "Appearance Discrimination, Lookism And Lookphobia In The Workplace." 791

description. Qualitative descriptive studies' main goal is a comprehensive summarization, in conventional terms, of specific events experienced by individuals or groups of individuals.<sup>29</sup>

### 1. Participants

The participants were all employees working in a workplace in Indonesia. The researchers focus on samples from four workplaces, namely *BNI Syariah*, *Mandiri*, *Telkomsel*, and Directorate General of Immigration; thus, it has limited interpretive power in a broader context. Because women are concerned about their appearance, so the possibility of having a fat talk is much apparent there. This research focuses on collecting data in individual workplaces, and every workplace consists of departments. The service department has a higher possibility of fat talk because when workers who work in the service department are more aware of their appearances, they are also more self-conscious about their bodies.

### 2. Instrument and Data Collection

The instrument used in collecting and analyzing the data of the study was the citizen sociolinguists. Rymes and Leone coined the phrase citizen sociolinguistics as a modern methodology needed in the sociolinguistics approach.<sup>30</sup>

Citizen sociolinguistics “accounts for and partakes of the social demands and affordances of massive mobility and connectivity in today’s world.”<sup>31</sup> Therefore, the citizen sociolinguistics approach seems to be promising in capturing natural, spontaneous fat talk because citizens also in frequent contact with a conversation, including small talk. The citizen sociolinguists in the study went through two-phases, which are:

#### a. Recruitment

Seven citizen sociolinguists were recruited from four workplaces covering five women and two men aged 22-34 years old, who already fulfilled the characteristics of citizen sociolinguists, which includes: 1) working in one of the four sample workplaces; 2) Age range between 20-40 years old; 3) matured enough to give judgment; 4) live in East Java, Indonesia.

**Table 1.**  
Citizen Sociolinguistics (CITSLX) Profiles

No	Respondent Id	Gender	Age
1.	CITSLX01	Female	34
2.	CITSLX02	Male	22
3.	CITSLX03	Female	28
4.	CITSLX04	Female	33
5.	CITSLX05	Female	29
6.	CITSLX06	Female	29
7.	CITSLX07	Male	28

<sup>29</sup> Vickie A. Lambert and Clinton E. Lambert, “Qualitative Descriptive Research: An Acceptable Design,” *Pacific Rim International Journal of Nursing Research* 16, no. 4 (2012): 255–56.

<sup>30</sup> Betsy Rymes and Andrea Leone, “Citizen Sociolinguistics: A New Media Methodology for Understanding Language and Social Life,” *Working*

*Papers in Educational Linguistics (WPEL)* 29, no. 2 (2014): 25–43.

<sup>31</sup> Rymes and Leone, 25.

## b. Training

As many as two citizen sociolinguists were placed in every three workplaces, one citizen sociolinguist was placed in the rest of the workplace. All the citizen sociolinguists received training about the theoretical and social significance of fat talk by using Nichter and Vuckovic<sup>32</sup> and Bulik's<sup>33</sup> 12 types of fat talk. They also learn how to capture and document fat talk in their natural environment. The citizen sociolinguists learned about the study scope, protocols, methods, and how to use the observational template sheet. The observational sheet, which adapted the Prescribed Observational Sheet (Appendix A; SturtzSreetharan et al.),<sup>34</sup> was given to the citizen sociolinguists via google form for systematic data collection. The Prescribed Observational Sheet is slightly modified to fit the data searched by the researchers which consists of utterances that may indicate fat talk and the speech situation of the fat talk discussion.

**Table 2.**  
Triggers of Fat Talk

Apakah aku terlihat gemuk?	(Do I look fat?)
Aku rasa berat badanku naik.	(I think I gained weight.)
Pahaku terlihat besar jika aku memakai jeans.	(My thighs look big when I'm wearing jeans)
Aku terlihat kurus sekali!	(I look so skinny!)

<sup>32</sup> Nichter and Vuckovic, "Fat Talk," 109–31.

<sup>33</sup> Bulik, *The Woman in the Mirror: How to Stop Confusing What You Look Like with Who You Are*. 174-180

<sup>34</sup> SturtzSreetharan et al., "Fat Talk," 263–83.

Ya Tuhan, aku tidak percaya aku baru saja memesan <i>fast food</i> . Padahal aku sudah cukup gendut.	(God, I can't believe I just ordered fast food. I'm already fat enough.)
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Aku perlu menurunkan berat badan.	(I need to lose some weight.)
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Additionally, to gain rich data on fat talk, the citizen sociolinguists learned how to generate a situation where fat talk may happen by giving fat talk triggers. The example of triggers above is in sentences, which then uttered by the citizen sociolinguists in their workplace. However, not all collected utterances would be used for the research. Only the utterances that happened during the conversation and indicated as fat talk were taken.

Citizen sociolinguists were first given a brief overview of the study before being asked to sign a consent form. Then, they received instruction on how to collect fat talk data through workplace observation. The researchers used the WhatsApp group to maintain the study's legitimacy and serves as a platform for meetings. These meetings were critical for team cohesion, citizen sociolinguists' long-term viability, and problem-solving.<sup>35</sup> The data collection would be stopped after the collected data was saturated. In a qualitative study like this recent research, data saturation refers to "the quality and quantity of information."<sup>36</sup> The researchers consider data saturation as what is

<sup>35</sup> Agostini et al., "Citizen Sociolinguistics." 1-16

<sup>36</sup> Sandra L. Faulkner and Stormy P. Trotter, "Data Saturation," in *The International Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods* (Atlanta: American Cancer Society, 2017), 1, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118901731.iecrm0060>.

described by Corbin and Strauss,<sup>37</sup> and Bowen referring to the point at which no new concepts, themes, or issues with a data category emerge, or only when nothing new is applied to the data.<sup>38</sup>

### 3. Data Analysis

First, the researchers inspected and removed those observations that were not qualified as fat talk. Second, the collected data from citizen sociolinguistics were analyzed in-depth to generalize possible linguistic characteristics of fat talk; it could be from the noun, verb, or adjective aspects used in fat talk discussion. Third, the researchers drew a conclusion based on the finding and discussion to answer the research problem.

### C. Results

As mentioned before, the data collection would stop after the data was saturated; it took 22 days for the data to be saturated. The citizen sociolinguists documented as many as 34 conversations; after removing data which were not qualified as a fat talk. In the end, 24 conversations, consisting of 29 data of fat talk were left and prepared for analysis.

#### 1. Observations Qualified as Fat Talk

The remaining 24 conversations are qualified as a fat talk based on Nichter

and Vuckovic,<sup>39</sup> Nichter,<sup>40</sup> and Bulik's<sup>41</sup> 12 types of fat talk: Generic, Compliment-Fishing, Comparative, Can't-Take-A-Compliment, Competitive, Silent, Joking, Stealth, Fat-Stigmatization, Fat-Is-Ugly, Personalized, and Bullying. Those observations consist of 29 fat talk data qualified into seven types of the 12 Bulik's fat talk types presented in the table below:

**Table 3.**  
Data of Fat Talk

No	Types of fat talk	Example of fat talk
1.	Generic	"My thighs look big when I wear leggings."
2.	Generic	"Does this shirt look good on my fat body?"
3.	Generic	"This stomach is never empty, huh?"
4.	Generic	"It looks like I am getting fat."
5.	Generic	"I need to lose weight."
6.	Generic	"Oh God, I cannot believe I just ordered fritters. I am already fat as it is."
7.	Generic	"I swear I gain weight. It is usually not like this."
8.	Compliment-Fishing	"Why? I look fat on it, don't I?"
9.	Compliment-Fishing	"Yeah, A told me that I am getting fat. I am not confident wearing my old clothes."
10.	Compliment-Fishing	"What if I wear this one? Do I look fat?"
11.	Compliment-Fishing	"Do I look more tanned?"
12.	Compliment-Fishing	"But, I am fat, aren't I?"

<sup>37</sup> Juliet M. Corbin and Anselm Strauss, "Theory Research: Procedures, Canons, and Evaluative Criteria Grounded," *Qualitative Sociology* 13, no. 1 (1990): 3–21, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00988593>.

<sup>38</sup> Glenn A. Bowen, "Naturalistic Inquiry and the Saturation Concept: A Research Note," *Qualitative Research* 8, no. 1 (2008): 137–52, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794107085301>.

<sup>39</sup> Nichter and Vuckovic, "Fat Talk," 109.

<sup>40</sup> Nichter and Vuckovic, 109.

<sup>41</sup> Bulik, *The Woman in the Mirror: How to Stop Confusing What You Look Like with Who You Are*. 174-180



13.	Compliment-Fishing	"White clothes don't suit me. I look fat wearing bright colors."
14.	Comparative	"Lucky you, you can keep eating and gain no weight."
15.	Joking	"With that big body, you need to watch out for flat tires."
16.	Fat-is-Ugly	"Cute face, but a big body"
17.	Personalized	"That dress does not suit you."
18.	Personalized	"You look like you are getting fat."
19.	Personalized	"She should go on a diet. She could sell more that way."
20.	Personalized	"Overweight, sis"
21.	Personalized	"Go-food again, eating again."
22.	Personalized	"Why are you eating? Aren't you on a diet?"
23.	Personalized	"Does it look like you gain weight?"
24.	Bullying	"Nope (that shirt doesn't look good on you)- while laughing"
25.	Bullying	"Aw G, it's still early, and you are already eating."
26.	Bullying	"Constantly on go-food, look at that belly."
27.	Bullying	"Only your body is big."
28.	Bullying	"Look at those fats!"
29.	Bullying	"Well, not really. I had someone at my work which was worse than you are."

## 2. Types of Fat Talk from Qualified Conversations

Out of 12 types of Fat Talk proposed by Bulik, only seven types were found in the observations collected by the citizen sociolinguists in the workplaces. These seven types are generic, compliment-fishing, comparative, joking, fat-is-ugly, personalized, and bullying. The following

points would define the analysis of the eligible findings by the kind of fat talk:

### a. Generic

This type of fat talk is the most common type which we often hear or say. There are six data indicated as the generic type of fat talk found on the observations, such as in the following:

D1: *Pahaku kelihatan besar kalau pakai legging* (My thighs look big when I wear leggings). Leggings cover the legs with the elastic close-fitting garment's nature, which may make our thighs look bigger than they should. This fat talk utterance is common among women who usually wear leggings for sportswear or casual outfit; thus, this data is indicated as the generic type of fat talk.

### b. Compliment Fishing

Same as it is called, this type of fat talk occurs when people are fishing for compliments, which, according to Bulik, is the "but you are not fat" comment. There are six data indicated as the compliment-fishing type of fat talk, such as the following:

D9: *Iya, kata si A aku tambah gendut, jadi aku gak pede pakai bajuku yang lama* (Yeah, A told me that I am getting fat. I am not confident wearing my old clothes). This utterance means that the speaker felt unconfident about wearing her old clothes since A said she is gaining weight. However, the speaker wanted to compliment the addressee that she is not gaining weight or finding justification from another person's opinion. Therefore, the speaker is fishing for the compliment.

### c. Comparative

This type of fat talk happens when people commiserate over their bodies as a group. There is only one data indicated as the comparative type of fat talk, which shown in the following:

D14: *Kamu enak makan banyak gak bisa gemuk* (Lucky you, you can keep eating and gain no weight). This comment implied that the speaker compares her body with another person's body and commiserate over her body as a group. The speaker thought process behind it is 'My fat is worse than yours'; thus, this comment indicated the comparative type of fat talk.

### d. Joking

In this type, people usually try to joke about someone's size or poke fun at themselves. There is only one datum indicated as the joking type of fat talk, which shown in the following:

D15: *Badan besar boncengan hati-hati gembos* (With that big body, you need to watch out for flat tires). This comment was said humorously towards someone who drives. The speaker joked that the vehicle's tires could be flat when the addressee moved it, which may not happen. This comment is a joke thrown at someone's size; thus, this datum belongs to the joking type of fat talk.

### e. Fat-Is-Ugly

This type of fat talk retains the idea that fat and attractive are oxymorons. There is only one datum indicated as the fat-is-ugly type of fat talk, which shown in the following:

D16: *Mukanya imut tapi badannya besar* (Cute face, but a big body). This utterance consists of the adjective 'cute' and 'big,' which are oxymorons; thus, this datum indicated as the fat-is-ugly type of fat talk.

### f. Personalized

This type of fat talk tends to be more targeted and personal towards a specific person regarding her or his appearance. There are seven data indicated the personalized type of fat talk, such as in the following:

D20: *Kegemukan kak* (Overweight, sis). The speaker threw this comment for the specific addressee regarding how they look; thus, this datum indicated the personalized type of fat talk.

### g. Bullying

This type is straight disrespectful, hurtful, and also power-seeking towards a person. There are six data indicated the bullying type of fat talk, such as in the following:

D27: *Badan gede doang* (Only your body is big). This utterance tends to blaspheme the addressee for being fat. The speaker also implied that the addressee does not have anything to brag about. It was no surprise if the addressee felt hurtful after the speaker's comment; thus, this datum indicated a bullying type of fat talk.

## 3. Discussion

There are 29 utterances qualified as fat talk data. From the finding, each data were already classified according to the types of fat talk. The most frequent types

of fat talk uttered by workers in fat talk discussion are generic and personalized, with a 24 percentage. It is not surprising that generic is one of the most frequently used types because it is the most common or basic type of fat talk discussion where many people used it a lot, even outside the workplace.

The personalized type of fat talk became the most frequently used type because many people cared about other people's business when they should be focused on themselves, mostly Indonesian, which led them to raise a targeted, personal, and petty fat talk discussion. This type more likely emerges from people who feel that they must tell someone what they should do, eat, or wear.

The second most frequently used types are compliment-fishing and bullying with the same percentage, which is 21%. It is the essence that people like to be praised to the extent that they are intrigued by other people to praise them. Therefore, people are usually fishing for compliments by asking questions regarding their appearance and looking for the ", but you are not fat." As for bullying, it can be affected by how close is the relationship between the workers. Most of the time, people who are closed with each other tend to be not careful about delivering the message. Sometimes it can be a bit harsh, which indicates intimacy but it is still hurtful for other people. Another may be derived from the discussion context; for example, people tend to mock other people disrespectfully when gossiping.

The rest of the type, comparative, joking, and fat-is-ugly, is least in terms of usage in the workplaces. The comparative type of fat talk with 4% of percentage is likely less to be used because people in the workplace do not like to sympathize over their bodies as a group. While the joking type of fat talk with 3% of percentage is less likely to be found in the workplace because the workplace itself is considered formal, thus; it is not typical for someone joking or finding humor in someone's size. Moreover, the fat-is- ugly type with a 3% percentage is least likely to be found in workplaces because people may find fat and attractive is synonymous.

From Bulik's 12 types of fat talk, five types were not found in the observation of fat talk in the workplace, and these types are can't-take-a-compliment, competitive, silent, stealth, and fat stigmatization. Can't-take-a-compliment cannot be found because people in the workplace may find no difficulty taking compliments; they are accepted as it is. Meanwhile, the competitive type of fat talk is hardly found because workers may not have the competitiveness in fat talk or dieting; instead, they have competition for recognition, bonuses, and promotions. As for silent fat talk, it is hard for the citizen sociolinguists to pick up this type because there is no way in knowing it other than they experience it themselves; thus, this type is called silent.

Furthermore, the stealth type of fat talk was not found in the observation. People in the workplace do not usually give compliments reason based on others' weight; they instead trigger compliments;

thus, compliment-fishing is the second most used type. The last type that was not found in the observation is the fat-stigmatization type of fat talk. This is because people do not have some prejudices against individuals of size. They rather aim the fat talk discussion towards a specific person; thus, personalized fat talk has the highest percentage.

In this study, the researchers also analyzed the pattern of linguistic characteristics of a fat talk discussion based on the types of fat talk found in the finding. In the linguistics field, there are major branches, namely, phonetics and phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. To generalize the linguistic characteristics of fat talk, the researchers only focus on the lexical categories or parts of speech (e.g., noun, verb, preposition), which deals with the types of words are formed. Seeing from the lexical categories or parts of speech, most of the fat talk analyzed here use noun, verb, and adjectives to discuss things related to body appearance or dissatisfaction, and it should often appear during a fat talk discussion.

Based on the collected data of fat talk in the workplace, some nouns are used continuously in the discussion, namely, nouns related to:

- a. Body parts, such as *thighs*, *stomach*, *belly*, *face*, and *body*.
- b. Clothes, such as *leggings*, *shirt*, *dress*, and *clothes*.
- c. Food, such as *fritters*, *Gojek/Go-food* (food delivery service), and *food*.

- d. Body health, such as *weight*, *diet*, and *fat*.

The use of these nouns in a conversation during a speech situation becomes the possible linguistic characteristics of a fat talk discussion, as shown in the examples below where the underlined words are the possible noun characteristics of fat talk discussion.

Examples:

- D1: *Pahaku kelihatan besar kalau pakai leggings* (My thighs look big when I wear leggings)
- D9: *Iya, kata si A aku tambah gendut, jadi aku gak pede pakai bajuku yang lama* (Yeah, A told me that I am getting fat. I am not confident wearing my old clothes)

According to the finding, some verbs are used continuously in the fat talk discussion in the workplaces, namely verbs related to:

- a. Appearance, such as *look*, *wear*, and *suit*.
- b. Weight, such as *eat*, *gain*, and *lose*.

However, one verb is used a lot, which is "get." The verb "get" can mean enter a specified state or situation; become. The verb "get" is usually used in the verb phrase *getting fat* based on the finding. Moreover, most of the fat talk discussions are in the type generic. Many people do not realize that they are entering the phase or state of fat; thus, the verb *get* is used a lot in a fat talk discussion. Those verbs are the possible linguistic characteristic of a fat talk

discussion, which uses those verbs shown in the underlined word's examples below.

D1: *Pahaku kelihatan besar kalau pakai legging* (My thighs look big when I wear leggings).

D4: *Sepertinya aku bertambah gemuk* (Looks like I gain weight)

D5: *Aku perlu menurunkan berat badan* (I need to lose weight)

As for the adjective, the finding showed that the most frequently used adjective in the fat talk discussion in the workplace is namely related to:

- a. The context of physical appearance such as *good, fat, cute, suitable, and tan.*
- b. The context of a size such as *big* and *overweight*

Those adjectives are the possible linguistic characteristics of fat talk discussion. The use of some of the adjectives shown in the examples below by the underlined word.

D1: *Pahaku kelihatan besar kalau pakai legging* (My thighs look big when I wear leggings)

D2: *Baju ini cocok kah buat aku yang gendut?* (Does this shirt look good on my fat body?)

D11: *Aku hitam ya sekarang?* (Do I look more tanned?)

Compared to the previous research studies, recent research findings are mostly in line with those of the previous studies regarding the effect that fat talk issues bring to the people receiving it. Both current research finding and those of previous studies claim that the fat talk

phenomenon which may refer to attitude, issues, discussion, expression, or responses related to fat talk and its similar counterparts like body objectification or body dissatisfaction, tend to create a negative effect on the persons who happened to have those limitations (Gapinski et al., 2003;<sup>42</sup> Ousley et al., 2007;<sup>43</sup> Kartawidjaja & Cordero, 2013;<sup>44</sup> Engeln et al., 2013;<sup>45</sup> Danakalis et al., 2015<sup>46</sup>). Those negative feelings are manifested differently by those who think they are lacking in meeting mainstream parameter on the so-called "ideal body."

Body objectification or body dissatisfaction in which fat talk may fall into this category may result in increased negative feelings, decreased intrinsic motivation, lower self-efficacy, and diminished cognitive functioning.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, it can also create an uncomfortable feeling for those whose job is related to performance, for example, dancers<sup>48</sup> and sport.<sup>49</sup> According to

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<sup>42</sup> Gapinski, Brownell, and LaFrance, "Body Objectification and 'Fat Talk.'" 377–88.

<sup>43</sup> Ousley, Cordero, and White, "Fat Talk among College Students." 73–84.

<sup>44</sup> Kartawidjaja and Cordero, "Fat Talk and Body Dissatisfaction Among College Dancers." 122–29

<sup>45</sup> Engeln, Sladek, and Waldron, "Body Talk among College Men." 300–308.

<sup>46</sup> Dakanalis et al., "Male Body Dissatisfaction and Eating Disorder Symptomatology." 80–90.

<sup>47</sup> Gapinski, Brownell, and LaFrance, "Body Objectification and 'Fat Talk.'" 377–88.

<sup>48</sup> Kartawidjaja and Cordero, "Fat Talk and Body Dissatisfaction Among College Dancers." 122–29.

<sup>49</sup> Catherine M. Sabiston et al., "What's a Coach to Do? Exploring Coaches' Perspectives of Body Image in Girls Sport," *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* 48 (2020): 101669, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2020.101669>.

Danakalis et al.<sup>50</sup> and Ousley,<sup>51</sup> to its severe degree, body dissatisfaction may cause severe eating disorders.

Last, fat talk also lowers persons' self-esteem and confidence,<sup>52</sup> (see also Steinsbekk et al.,<sup>53</sup> Mills et al.,<sup>54</sup> and Pop<sup>55</sup>). However, there is only one research finding of the previous study which states that despite its negative effect; however, body satisfaction or fat talk occurrence is claimed to have a positive effect on body image<sup>56</sup> as persons who are reminded of their body state by using fat talk expression, they will finally have mindful eating habits, so the more the persons engaged in fat talk discussion, they will be more aware of the way they eat as it will affect the way they appreciate their body image.

Another similarity between the previous studies and the current research lies in the gender of persons who mostly get fat talk issues. The recent study

revealed that fat talk discussion negatively affects women and young adults because young adults are at the age where physical appearance holds an essential role in their daily lives. Additionally, women care so much and are sensitive about their looks; thus, their appearance is significant. Agostini et al.,<sup>57</sup> Katrevich,<sup>58</sup> and Engeln et al.<sup>59</sup> state that unlike women, negative body talk among men appears to be no less troubling than those identified among women.

However, some aspects of the recent research findings show a difference with the previous study done by SturtzSreetharan et al.<sup>60</sup> Even though both the current study and the previous study have the same research consideration, namely fat talk, the latter concerns more on the manner on how people react to fat talk without considering the context or places where the fat talk phenomenon happens and the gender involves in it. Conversely, the recent research studied the fat talk phenomena by focusing on workplace context and emphasizes the investigation regarding linguistic characteristics of fat talk discussion of mixed-gender interaction. In addition, the result of current research is also different from the previous study as this present study revealed that fat talk

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<sup>50</sup> Dakanal et al., "Male Body Dissatisfaction and Eating Disorder Symptomatology." 80–90.

<sup>51</sup> Ousley, Cordero, and White, "Fat Talk among College Students." 73–84.

<sup>52</sup> Engeln, Sladek, and Waldron, "Body Talk among College Men." 300-308.

<sup>53</sup> Silje Steinsbekk et al., "The Impact of Social Media Use on Appearance Self-Esteem from Childhood to Adolescence - A 3-Wave Community Study," *Computers in Human Behavior* 114 (2021): 106528, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2020.106528>.

<sup>54</sup> Jennifer S. Mills et al., "'Selfie' Harm: Effects on Mood and Body Image in Young Women," *Body Image* 27 (2018): 86–92, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2018.08.007>.

<sup>55</sup> Cristiana Pop, "Self-Esteem and Body Image Perception in a Sample of University Students," *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research (EJER)* 16, no. 64 (2016): 31–44, <https://doi.org/10.14689/ejer.2016.64.2>.

<sup>56</sup> Webb et al., "'Mom, Quit Fat Talking—I'm Trying to Eat (Mindfully) Here!'" 169-75.

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<sup>57</sup> Agostini et al., "Citizen Sociolinguistics."

<sup>58</sup> Alina Katrevich, J.D. Register, and Mara Aruguete, "The Effect of Negative Body Talk in an Ethnically Diverse Sample of College Students," *North American Journal of Psychology* 16, no. 1 (2014): 43–52.

<sup>59</sup> Engeln, Sladek, and Waldron, "Body Talk among College Men." 300-308.

<sup>60</sup> SturtzSreetharan et al., "Fat Talk," 263–83.

discussion has nothing to do with discrimination at working places.

In this current study, the researchers only focus on the types of fat talk and the linguistic characteristic. The future researchers consider having a different research field in a broader context as the current study's findings may be valid only for people in workplaces. Last, the future researchers need to involve the context of a conversation, such as using Dell Hymes' S.P.E.A.K.I.N.G. model to understand the context where fat talk happens.

#### D. Conclusion

Fat talk discussion is considered a new language variant that served a particular language for the working community. Some of the 12 Bulik's types of fat talk are found in this study involving generic, compliment fishing, comparative, joking, fat is ugly, personalized, and bullying. Fat talks do not always mean offending. People use fat talks to gain a closer or more intimate relationship with other colleagues through joking and friendly talking. Therefore, participants need to use some appropriate strategies to prevent the occurrence of offending the addressee.

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## Appendix A:

### “Fat Talk Observational Sheet”

Adapted from Cindi L. SturtzSreetharan et al., “Fat Talk: A Citizen Sociolinguistic Approach,” *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 23, no. 3 (2019): 263–83, <https://doi.org/10.1111/josl.12342>.

# Fat Talk Observational Sheet

\* Required

## 1. Data retrieval time \*

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*Example: January 7, 2019 11:03 AM*

## 2. Workplace where fat talk happens\* (*Mark only one oval!*)

- BNI Syariah
- Mandiri
- Telkomsel
- Kantor Imigrasi

## 3. Citizen Sociolinguist ID (*Mark only one oval!*)

- CITSLX01
- CITSLX02
- CITSLX03
- CITSLX04
- CITSLX05
- CITSLX06
- CITSLX07

4. What order do the fat talk interaction of the day?

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5. 1. Write the utterance that indicated as fat talk (as best as you can recall) \*

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2. Write the response given by the second speaker

If there is an oral response, please fill in questions 2-4, otherwise proceed to question 5

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3. If Speaker 1 replies to Speaker 2, write it below

If there is an oral response, please fill in questions 2-4, otherwise proceed to question 5

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4. If Speaker 2 replies again, write it below

If there is an oral response, please fill in questions 2-4, otherwise proceed to question 5

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6. Were you directly involved in conversations that are indicated as fat talk \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes *Skip to question 7*
- No *Skip to question 8*

7. If you were directly involved in the conversation, were you... \*

*Check one.*

- Initiate the conversation (You were Speaker 1)
- Respond to a comment made by someone else (You were Speaker 2)

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