

SEMANTIC STUDY: THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON CHANGING THE MEANING OF SLANG WORDS AMONG TEENAGERS IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

In the digital era like today, social media has become a very dominant platform for communication among young people and adults in the world, even in Indonesia. One of the most prominent linguistic phenomena in this context is the emergence and evolution of youth slang, which often involves significant shifts in language meaning. This study aims to analyze changes in the meaning of words used in Indonesian youth slang on social media from a semantic perspective. This study applies a qualitative descriptive approach by collecting and examining slang expressions commonly used by Indonesian teenagers on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, and Instagram. Data were analyzed using the theory of semantic change, focusing on types of meaning shifts such as amelioration, pejoration, narrowing, expansion, and metaphorical expansion. In the findings of this study, the author reveals that many slang terms have undergone significant shifts in meaning, which are often influenced by cultural trends, popular media, and peer group dynamics. For example, words that originally had neutral or even negative meanings are now used in positive or humorous contexts. This shift reflects the dynamic and creative nature of youth language, as well as the role of social media in accelerating linguistic change. This study contributes to the field of semantics by highlighting the mechanisms of semantic change in informal contexts driven by youth, and underlines the importance of contextual and social factors in understanding the evolution of meaning.

Keywords : semantics, slang, Indonesian youth, social media, semantic change, word meaning

INTRODUCTION

Language is not a static entity; it evolves continuously in response to changes in social structures, technological advances, and cultural interactions. One of the most dynamic and rapidly changing aspects of language is slang, an informal and non-standard vocabulary often used by certain groups to build identity, solidarity, or resistance to common norms. Among the groups most active in shaping and spreading slang are teenagers, who are not only immersed in transitional stages of life but are also heavily influenced by trends, peer interactions, and digital communication. In the Indonesian context, slang has long been a hallmark of youth

identity and expression, but the emergence of social media has significantly accelerated and diversified the process of semantic change in the use of slang.

Social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Twitter (X), WhatsApp, and YouTube have revolutionized the way language is created, distributed, and reinterpreted. Teenagers, as digital natives, engage with language in fluid, creative, and performative ways. Research by Crystal (2011) highlights that digital communication creates fertile ground for linguistic innovation, especially in vocabulary. Similarly, Androutsopoulos (2006) emphasizes the role of online platforms in promoting “participatory culture,” where users co-construct meaning and influence linguistic trends outside of traditional norms.

In Indonesia, this phenomenon can be seen in how slang terms such as “gabut,” “healing,” “mager,” or “santuy” have shifted their meaning or acquired new connotations based on their use in memes, texts, viral videos, and online chats. For example, the English word “healing” originally referred to the process of recovery, especially from illness or trauma, but in Indonesian youth slang, it now generally means going on vacation or taking a break to relax—an example of semantic shift influenced by digital contexts and lifestyle trends. Such changes are in line with what Ullmann (1972) categorized as semantic shift, particularly through metaphorical extension and refinement.

From a linguistic perspective, such transformations can be analyzed through the lens of semantic change, which includes processes such as broadening, narrowing, refinement, pejoration, metaphorization, and metonymy (Blank, 1999). Social media accelerates these processes by enabling rapid dissemination and feedback loops, where the use and meaning of a term are continuously negotiated in real time among a wide audience. In many cases, the meaning of slang words is not simply changed but recontextualized within the framework of internet culture, humor, and online identity performances.

This study aims to investigate how social media influences the semantic evolution of slang words among Indonesian adolescents. The main research problem focuses on identifying patterns of semantic change and determining the extent to which digital platforms influence the reinterpretation of slang vocabulary. By analyzing popular slang terms used on social media and interpreting them using semantic theory, this study seeks to uncover how language reflects shifting social values, group identities, and communication needs in the digital age.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1.Semantic

Semantics is a core subfield of linguistics that deals with the study of meaning in language. It explores how words, phrases, and sentences convey meaning and how that meaning is interpreted by speakers and listeners. According to Lyons (1977), semantics “is concerned with the relationship between language and the world: how words and sentences map onto the objects, actions, and concepts they refer to.” It includes denotative meaning (literal meaning, dictionary meaning) and connotative meaning (associated or implied meanings shaped by context and social experience). In linguistic studies, semantics is often divided into several areas, such as:

A. Lexical Semantics

Lexical semantics is a branch of semantics that focuses on the study of the meaning of individual words and how they relate to each other in a lexical system. This study includes the analysis of phenomena such as synonymy (words that have similar meanings), antonymy (words with opposite meanings), polysemy (one word with many related meanings), homonymy (words that are the same in form but have different meanings), and hyponymy (the relationship between general and specific words). In lexical semantics, words are considered as basic units of meaning and are studied in depth in the context of their use. For example, the word "head" in Indonesian can mean a part of the human body, the leader of an institution, or the tip of an object. All of these meanings are studied in lexical semantics to determine the relationship of meanings and how these meanings develop. In the development of adolescent language on social media, lexical semantics plays an important role in understanding how the meaning of a word (especially slang) can change, expand, or narrow depending on the social and cultural context.

B. Compositional Semantics

Compositional semantics is a branch of semantics that studies how the meaning of a sentence or complex phrase is formed from the meanings of its constituent words and its syntactic structure. This approach is based on the principle of compositionality, namely that the overall meaning of a linguistic expression is determined by the meanings of its parts and the way those parts are arranged. For example, in the sentence "The child reads a book", the meaning of the sentence is formed from the individual meanings of the words "child", "it", "read", and "book", as well as the grammatical relationships between them. However,

compositional semantics also includes the analysis of expressions that cannot be interpreted literally, such as idioms or metaphors. For example, the phrase "eat liver" compositionally means the act of eating a liver organ, but idiomatically means experiencing sadness or disappointment. Compositional semantics is very important in understanding the dynamics of meaning in everyday language, including how sentence structure can create new meanings or cause ambiguity, especially in creative and contextual language uses such as in social media.

C. Pragmatic Semantics

Pragmatic semantics is an approach to semantics that emphasizes the importance of context in interpreting meaning. Unlike lexical and compositional semantics, which focus on meaning within the language system itself, pragmatic semantics looks at how social, situational, and cultural factors influence the meaning of an utterance. This means that a single word or sentence can have different meanings depending on who says it, to whom, in what situation, and for what purpose. For example, the sentence "You're really serious!" can be a compliment or an insult depending on the intonation, facial expression, or social context of the conversation. In the virtual world and social media, pragmatic semantics becomes especially relevant because much of the meaning is determined by the visual context (such as emojis), the sound (such as the tone of voice in a video), or the particular digital culture (such as memes or viral trends). Pragmatic semantics also includes theories such as implicature (implied meaning), presupposition (assumed meaning), and speech acts, all of which play an important role in effective communication. Thus, this approach helps explain how new meanings are formed and understood collectively by a particular language user community, including young people on social media.

In the context of this research, lexical semantics plays a central role, especially in examining how the meanings of slang words shift due to social media influence. As Saeed (2016) argues, meaning is not an inherent or fixed quality of words but rather a product of usage and social interaction. This aligns with the idea that language is dynamic, with meaning constantly negotiated and reshaped depending on cultural and communicative needs.

2. Meaning Changes

Change of meaning is one of the phenomena in linguistics that shows the dynamics and flexibility of language in responding to social, cultural, and technological developments. In semantic studies, change of meaning refers to the process of shifting the meaning of a word from its original meaning, either becoming broader, narrower, more positive, more negative, or

even changing figuratively. According to Ullmann (1972), change of meaning is a natural consequence of the continuous use of language in society. The development of social media and the current digital era has accelerated and expanded the occurrence of changes in meaning, especially among teenagers who actively create and spread new terms through platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter. The slang they use becomes a fertile arena for the birth of new meanings, both through word innovation and shifts in the function and nuances of old words. Some of the most common types of changes in meaning include:

1. Broadening

In this type of change, a word that initially had a narrow meaning becomes more general or broader in scope. For example, the word "gang" in the past was often interpreted as a certain group that was identical to exclusivity or even negative connotations such as motorcycle gangs. However, in the daily conversations of today's teenagers, gangs are widely used to refer to ordinary friendship groups, such as "school gangs", "healing gangs", or "content gangs". This phenomenon shows that the meaning of the word has expanded from negative associations to more neutral or even positive meanings. Cruse (1986) emphasized that broadening occurs when a word is used in new contexts consistently, so that its scope of reference becomes wider.

2. Narrowing

On the other hand, narrowing also occurs when the meaning of a word that was originally broad becomes more specific. The word "cuan", which comes from the Hokkien dialect and means profit in a general sense, is now narrowed to refer specifically to financial gain in the context of the digital economy, online business, or investment. Expressions such as "lagi cari cuan di TikTok Shop" or "cuan gede dari saham" are evidence that the meaning of "cuan" has been narrowed to its use in the financial world. Ullmann (1972) explains that narrowing usually occurs due to changes in social habits and the emergence of the need to distinguish meaning more precisely in communication.

3. Pejoration

Changes in meaning can also occur towards negative or positive connotations. Changes in meaning towards the negative are called pejoration. For example, the word "receh" which literally means small coins, is now used in slang to refer to something that is unimportant, ridiculously funny, or less serious. For example, expressions such as "Jokes kamu receh banget, tapi lucu" show that the meaning of "receh" has declined from a physical meaning to a cognitive-emotional meaning that tends to be demeaning. According to Rahardi (2001),

pejoration occurs when a word is associated with low things or is considered less valuable by society.

4. Amelioration

In contrast, amelioration occurs when the meaning of a word becomes better or more positive than before. A real example in teenage slang is the word "Santai". In the past, this word was synonymous with being lazy or unproductive. But now, in the context of digital conversations, "Santai" is considered a positive attitude, namely calm, not panicking, and remaining stable under pressure. Sentences such as "He was really relaxed during his thesis defense, cool!" show a shift in meaning towards the positive. Blank (1999) argues that amelioration occurs because of changes in social perception of the word in question, usually through the media and changes in collective culture.

5. Metaphoric

metaphorical shift, which is when a word is used figuratively, rather than literally. The word "hot", for example, is no longer used only to indicate temperature, but is now often used to describe a tense, emotional, or controversial situation or feeling, as in the sentence "The Twitter timeline is really hot because of the fandom war." Lakoff and Johnson (1980) in their work *Metaphors We Live By* emphasize that metaphor is a cognitive structure that is inherent in the way humans think, and not just a style of language.

6. Metonymy

Metonymy is a change in meaning based on a logical or physical close relationship. In the context of digital youth, the word "camera" can be used to represent activities as a content creator or vlogger. Expressions such as "I live from the camera now" indicate that the word "camera" has changed from its literal meaning to a symbol of a digital profession. Ullmann (1972) stated that metonymy often occurs because of the need for efficiency in communication, where one element is used to represent a whole meaning that is closely related.

7. Neologisme

Neologisms or the creation of new meanings are very prominent in the digital era. Indonesian teenagers are very creative in creating new meanings from existing words, especially those from foreign languages. The word "healing", for example, in English means the process of restoring health. However, in teenage conversations, this word changes meaning into a fun activity such as a vacation or a trip to relieve stress, such as "I need healing to Bali this week." Another example is the word "gabut", which originally meant "blind salary", is now

interpreted as a condition of "no work". Yule (2010) explains that neologisms reflect the ability of language to adapt to changes in time, culture and technology in a creative and dynamic way.

Blank (1999) and Traugott & Dasher (2002) argue that semantic change is often motivated by social factors. When speakers give new meanings to words, either intentionally or unintentionally, it reflects not only linguistic economy but also changes in worldview, identity, and values. In the digital age, social media accelerates these changes due to high-frequency interactions, multimodal expressions (e.g., memes, videos), and the viral nature of content.

3. Slang Words

Slang is a form of informal language that is usually used by a particular group, which is often characterized by creativity, conciseness, and exclusivity of word meaning. According to Eble (1996), slang is "a set of everyday words and phrases that are always changing that speakers use to build or strengthen social identity or cohesiveness in a group." Slang is generally associated with youth culture, and the need for communication within a group that distinguishes members from outsiders".

In Indonesia, slang is often referred to as "Bahasa Gaul" has developed dynamically, influenced by regional languages, foreign terms, and most recently, the internet. Words such as "bucin" (love slave), "gabut" (blind salary, later reinterpreted as "not working"), or healing (from English, which now means a short vacation) illustrate how slang words experience a shift in meaning through widespread online use.

Slang is very sensitive to the social media environment. Androutsopoulos (2006) suggests that the Internet functions as a linguistic marketplace where new forms and meanings are continually tested, adopted, and discarded. Social media allows users to create, modify, and spread slang terms at an unprecedented rate, leading to rapid semantic change. In this way, slang serves as a powerful lens through which to observe how language responds to changes in the digital age.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1. Research Design

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach. The aim is to describe and analyze changes in the meaning of words in Indonesian youth slang used on social media, based on a

semantic perspective. This approach was chosen because it is appropriate for exploring linguistic phenomena that are dynamic, contextual, and meaning-based.

2. Data Source

The data sources in this study are slang words used by Indonesian youth on several popular social media platforms, especially: Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, Instagram, and other source like Youtube. The selection of these platforms is based on the fact that these three are the most widely used social media by Indonesian youth and are spaces rich in language innovation and informal interaction.

3. Sampling Technique

Data collection was carried out using purposive sampling, namely by selecting slang words that:

1. Often appear in uploads, comments, or videos from teenage users.
2. Experience a change in meaning compared to its initial or denotative meaning.
3. Have a context of use that is clear enough to be analyzed.

4. Data Collection Techniques

Data collection is carried out with the following steps:

1. Searching for uploads with certain keywords (eg: "gabut", "recek", "santuy", "auto", "gak ngotak").
2. Note the context of the sentence in which the word is used.
3. Note the date, platform, and user identity anonymously.
4. Documented and list the original form and new meaning of the word.

5. Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data is analyzed using semantic analysis based on the theory of meaning change by Ullmann (1972), Campbell (1998), and Traugott & Dasher (2002). The stages of analysis include:

1. Identification of word forms and their original meanings (denotative or in the dictionary).
2. Analysis of new meanings based on social and digital contexts.
3. Classification of types of meaning change: broadening, narrowing, amelioration, pejoration, metaphorical extension, or semantic shift.

4. Interpretation of factors causing changes in meaning, for example: the influence of popular culture, group identity, social media, or humor.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSION

Findings

The results of this study indicate that there are various words in Indonesian youth slang on social media that have undergone changes in meaning. These changes are not only limited to shifts in connotative meaning, but also involve changes in the type of meaning semantically, such as expansion, narrowing, increasing, decreasing, and even metaphorization of meaning. Based on data collected from platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, Twitter, and Instagram, and YouTube. Here are slang words in table form, which have changed meaning, classified by the type of semantic change:

No	Slang words	Denotatif Meaning	New Meaning	Types of meaning changes
1.	Receh	Small coins	funny, silly and unimportant things	Metaforical Extension
2.	Gabut	Combination of the words "gaji buta" (not working but getting paid)	condition of being bored and having nothing to do	Semantic Shift
3.	Auto	Related to automatic vehicles	Definitely, immediately, without a doubt	Metaforical Extension
4.	Gila	Mental Illness	Positive expression of admiration or surprise.	Amelioration
5.	Panik	Acute over-anxious, anxious	A joking expression when faced with something trivial or funny	Narrowing
6.	Santuy	Non-standard form of the word "santai"	Calm attitude in any situation	Broadening

7.	Gak ngotak	Not using logic	Very excessive (positive / negative)	Semantic Shift
8.	Gas	Vehicle fuel	Let's go ahead / do it	Metaphorical Extension
9.	Anjir	Rude words / rude expressions	A neutral general expression of surprise/amusement	Amelioration
10.	Mabar	Playing together specially gaming	Playing together not only games	Broadening
11.	Flexing	Flexing muscles	Show off wealth/expensive items on social media	Semantic Shift
12.	Cuan	Profit	Money, profit, money making opportunities	Broadening
13.	Sad Boy	There is none (combination of 'sad' + 'boy')	A guy who is too upset/shows excessive sadness	Pejoration
14.	Healing	Recovery Processes	Go on vacation to refresh your mind	Narrowing
15.	Skuy	The opposite of "yuks"	Come on / let's / casual form of invitation	
16.	Wibu	Big fan of Japanese culture	Anime/manga fans who are considered excessive	Pejoration
17.	Bucin	Slave Love	People who are too crazy about their partner	Semantic Shift
18.	Gaje	Not clear	Unintelligible/confusing behavior or speech	Pejoration
19.	Cieee	Light teasing/mocking tone	A flirtatious expression when someone is seen close to another person	Amelioration
20.	Kepo	Knowing Every Particular Object (Slang English)	Excessive curiosity about other people's affairs	Pejoration

Discussion

Changes in the meaning of words in Indonesian youth slang on social media reflect a dynamic, creative semantic process that is closely related to the development of digital culture. From the results of the analysis of words such as *receh*, *gabut*, *auto*, *bucin*, to *healing*, it can be concluded that changes in meaning occur due to the use of words in new contexts that are no longer in accordance with their original meaning. This is in line with Ullmann's (1972) view that the meaning of words will always change along with the social and cultural developments of language users.

One of the most prominent forms of change in meaning in youth slang is broadening and semantic shift. For example, the word *healing*, which comes from English and originally meant a physical or psychological healing process, is now more often used in the context of Indonesian youth to describe vacation activities or traveling as a form of "mind refreshment". This is a form of adaptation of meaning that is influenced by the local cultural environment.

In addition, changes in meaning also often occur through metaphorical extension, which is when a word is associated with a new meaning based on similarities in meaning or experience. For example, the word *gas*, which originally meant vehicle fuel, is now used to express an invitation such as "come on!" or "continue!". This is a form of metaphorization based on the analogy of acceleration or encouragement to act, like a vehicle being gassed to move.

In a social context, slang is not only used as a means of communication, but also as a marker of group identity. Teenagers as dominant users of social media use these words to show social affiliation, lifestyle, and closeness to contemporary digital culture. This strengthens the theory of Chaer and Agustina (2010) that language reflects the social structure of its users. Slang becomes part of adolescent identity and a means of self-expression in online communities.

Interestingly, some words also experience amelioration and pejoration, namely changes in meaning value to be more positive or negative. The word *crazy*, which originally meant a mental disorder, is now used positively to show admiration ("crazy, really cool!"), while the word *wibu*, which was originally neutral, now has a pejorative value and is used to refer to someone who is too fanatical about Japanese culture.

These findings show that language is not only a symbol system, but also a living social phenomenon. Social media plays a major role in accelerating the spread and normalization of

new meanings. When a term goes viral and is used repeatedly in various contexts, its meaning can change and even become standard in certain circles.

Thus, this study reveals that changes in meaning in youth slang are not random, but follow certain semantic patterns that can be analyzed linguistically. These changes not only enrich the Indonesian vocabulary but also show how language evolves together with its users in a fast-paced and interactive digital space.

CONCLUSION

My research concludes that the evolution of slang among Indonesian teenagers on social media is a dynamic and systematic process of semantic change. The slang words studied in this research, such as "recek," "gabut," "healing," and "bucin," have undergone significant shifts in meaning due to their frequent use in new social and digital contexts. The types of semantic changes observed include broadening, narrowing, amelioration, pejoration, metaphorical extension, and semantic shift. These shifts are influenced by cultural trends, digital communication styles, peer group dynamics, and media exposure. Social media serves not only as a communication platform but also as a linguistic laboratory where teenagers continually reshape language to suit their evolving identities and social environments. Therefore, this study reinforces the notion that language is a living and flexible system that reflects and adapts to societal changes, especially among teenagers in the digital age. This research focuses on the importance of context, identity, and digital media in the formation of meaning and language change.

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