

A STUDY OF SEMANTIC SHIFTS IN MODERN INDONESIAN VOCABULARY

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Abstract

This study investigates semantic shifts occurring in modern Indonesian vocabulary due to social, cultural, and technological changes. By analyzing selected lexical items from digital media, youth slang, and political discourse, this paper categorizes the types of semantic changes—such as narrowing, broadening, amelioration, and pejoration—that affect word meanings. The data was collected from online platforms, news articles, and social interactions, and analyzed using descriptive qualitative methods. Findings indicate that semantic shifts are often driven by internet culture, generational language innovation, and sociopolitical dynamics. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of how language evolves in response to contemporary realities

Keywords : Semantic shift, Indonesian language, lexical change, meaning, sociolinguistics, language evolution

INTRODUCTION

Language is dynamic and continuously adapts to the evolving needs of its speakers. In the Indonesian context, rapid development in media, technology, and culture has accelerated changes in vocabulary, leading to significant semantic shifts. Words that were once used with a particular meaning may now carry new, expanded, or even opposite meanings. The phenomenon of semantic change is a critical area in linguistics as it reflects not only linguistic structure but also social transformation. This study aims to analyze selected Indonesian words that have undergone semantic shifts and explain the factors contributing to these changes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Semantic shift, or semantic change, refers to the process by which the meanings of words change over time. According to Bloomfield (1933), semantic change can occur due to psychological, sociocultural, and linguistic factors. Ullmann (1962) classifies semantic shifts

into types such as broadening (generalization), narrowing (specialization), amelioration (positive change), and pejoration (negative change).

In the Indonesian context, several researchers (e.g., Kridalaksana, 2001; Chaer, 2012) have documented changes in word usage driven by urbanization, globalization, and youth culture. However, with the rise of social media and digital communication, more rapid and widespread changes in meaning are taking place, requiring renewed scholarly attention.

Speech Act Theory

The Speech Act Theory, originally introduced by **J.L. Austin (1962)** and later developed by **John Searle (1969)**, plays an important role in understanding how language functions not only to convey information, but also to perform actions. According to this theory, when people speak, they are not just saying something—they are also doing something. Each utterance can be analyzed into three acts:

- **Locutionary Act** – the actual utterance and its literal meaning.
- **Illocutionary Act** – the speaker’s intention behind the utterance (e.g., requesting, commanding, questioning).
- **Perlocutionary Act** – the effect the utterance has on the listener (e.g., persuading, frightening, amusing).

In the context of **semantic shifts**, especially in informal Indonesian, many words change meaning due to the **pragmatic functions** they serve in speech acts. For example:

- The word “**gas**”, originally meaning “fuel,” is now commonly used in online and spoken communication to **perform an illocutionary act of encouragement or command** (“Let’s go!”). Its semantic shift is closely tied to its performative function.
- The slang term “**healing**” is not only descriptive but also functions **illocutionarily as a justification or invitation** (e.g., “Ayo healing dulu,” meaning “Let’s take a break to refresh ourselves”).
- The term “**toxic**”, borrowed from English, functions as an **illocutionary warning or accusation**, often used in interpersonal contexts to mark disapproval.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze semantic shifts in selected Indonesian vocabulary. The data were collected from:

- Social media platforms (Twitter, TikTok, Instagram)

- Online news articles (Kompas, Detik, Tempo)
- Informal conversation among Indonesian youths

Ten commonly used words were selected based on frequency and evidence of meaning change. The analysis focused on identifying the type of semantic shift each word had undergone, supported by contextual examples and comparison with traditional definitions from standard dictionaries (e.g., KBBI).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Word	Original Meaning	Current Meaning	Type of Shift
Bucin	(tidak ada; slang baru)	Budak cinta (person blindly in love)	Broadening
Gas	Fuel	“Go ahead” or “let’s do it”	Metaphorical shift
Receh	Small coins	Cheap jokes / trivial things	Pejoration
Anak senja	Sunset lover (literal)	Stereotype of poetic youth	Broadening + irony
Caper	Abbreviation (cari perhatian)	Attention-seeker (negative)	Pejoration
Toxic	Poisonous	Harmful behavior in relationships	Semantic borrowing
Flexing	(English origin)	Showing off wealth	Borrowing + narrowing
Healing	Recovery from illness	Relaxation or vacation	Broadening
Kepo	Curious (from Hokkien origin)	Intrusively nosy	Pejoration
Mantul	Abbreviation (mantap betul)	Awesome, cool (slang)	Amelioration

The analysis reveals that many of the semantic shifts in Indonesian vocabulary are driven by youth slang and digital culture. Terms like *bucin*, *healing*, and *gas* emerge from reinterpretations influenced by meme culture and online trends. Borrowing from foreign

languages—especially English—is a common mechanism, but with significant localized adaptation. Notably, shifts such as pejoration (*kepo*, *caper*) reflect social attitudes and changing values among speakers

CONCLUSION

This study shows that modern Indonesian vocabulary is undergoing rapid semantic shifts due to digital communication, cultural trends, and social interaction. Most of these changes involve broadening of meaning, borrowing, and pejoration. The dynamic nature of language highlights the importance of continual linguistic observation and documentation. Future studies can expand the data set and explore regional variations or shifts influenced by specific social groups.

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