



AN ANALYSIS OF CONNOTATIVE MEANINGS FOUND IN SOCIAL MEDIA

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Abstract

This research aimed to find out how connotative meanings appeared and were used in the comments of social media users, especially Instagram and Twitter. Connotative meaning was chosen because it was able to show the emotional, expressive, and even subtle insinuations of users without having to say them directly, especially the concept of connotative meaning attached to words or expressions using Geoffrey Leech's theory of meaning. This research used a descriptive qualitative approach. The data were collected from various social media posts, then were categorized and analyzed based on three main characteristics of connotative meaning, namely: shared by other communicative systems, unstable, and open-ended. Connotative meaning was shared by other communicative systems, seen in comments that conveyed feelings implicitly. Connotative meaning was unstable, seen in the different interpretations of a single comment by different people. Meanwhile, connotative meaning was open-ended, reflected in how comments were greatly influenced by the writer's personal point of view. By understanding connotative meaning, people could be more sensitive to the hidden messages behind seemingly simple comments. The results of the analysis showed that connotative meaning not only enriched communication on social media, but also became a way for users to convey deeper, personal, and nuanced messages.

Keywords: connotative meaning, meaning, qualitative analysis, social media

1. Introduction

Language is a crucial aspect of human life because it functions as the main tool for communication. People use language to express ideas, share feelings, and interact with others. As social creatures, humans constantly communicate, and the form of communication has developed over time along with the progress of civilization. Linguistics as a discipline studies language broadly, covering all its aspects and components. One of its branches, pragmatics, focuses on meaning, especially on how people use language in context (Kreidler, 2002). Leech (1981) further explains that language meaning can be divided into conceptual and connotative meaning, with connotative meaning referring to the emotional and associative value of words beyond their literal sense.

In the digital era, communication has become easier through social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram. Users freely

express themselves in comments, which often contain connotative meanings to convey emotions, attitudes, sarcasm, or criticism indirectly. Unlike denotative meanings that show literal references, connotative meanings are subjective, unstable, and strongly influenced by context. Previous studies have examined denotative and connotative meanings in novels, song lyrics, and even religious texts. However, research that focuses specifically on connotative meanings in social media comments is still limited.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the characteristics of connotative meanings found in social media comments. The focus is on uncovering how language reflects hidden or implied meanings in online interactions, particularly in user responses on Instagram and Twitter. This research is significant because it highlights how people implicitly use language in digital communication, showing the emotional, subjective, and



dynamic nature of meaning in social media discourse.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Meaning

Meaning is one of the main focuses in linguistics because it functions as the foundation of communication. Human beings use language not only to exchange factual information but also to express emotions, attitudes, and intentions. Crystal (2008) explains that pragmatics studies meaning from the user's perspective, which includes the choices speakers make and their effects on communication. Kreidler (2002) emphasizes that pragmatics is related to the interpretation of utterances in context, while semantics focuses on literal meaning. Riemer (2010) supports this distinction by stating that semantics deals with sentence meaning, while pragmatics analyzes utterance meaning in specific contexts.

In addition, Löbner (2013) argues that meaning applies not only to language but also to human actions, because all actions have goals and intentions that can be interpreted. This shows that meaning is not static; instead, it is dynamic and built from both linguistic systems and communicative contexts. Thus, meaning becomes a crucial element in linguistic studies as it forms the basis of how people understand and respond to each other.

2.2 Connotative Meaning

Connotative meaning refers to meanings that go beyond the literal sense of words. Hasan (2023) explains that connotative meaning is unstable and can vary across cultures and personal experiences. Saifuddin (2018) relates connotative meaning to the relationship between signifier and signified, where indirect meanings emerge in communication. This can be seen in everyday use of language, for instance in social media comments where a word such as dog (*anjing*) may be used as an insult in one context but as admiration in another. Pratiwi et al. (2020) that connotative meaning exceeds conceptual meaning because it carries communicative value shaped by real-world experiences. Chaer (2014) further adds that connotative meaning

is tied to values and norms within a society or group, which means that a single word can carry positive, neutral, or negative impressions depending on its use. Keraf (2009) highlight that connotative meaning is strongly related to emotional and evaluative aspects of language. Therefore, understanding connotative meaning is essential when analyzing communication in social media, where implied and indirect meanings often dominate interaction.

2.3 Characteristics of Connotative Meaning

The characteristics of connotative meaning show how this meaning plays a role in communication, especially on social media, which is often indirect and emotionally charged. According to Leech (1981:12-13) there are three characteristics of connotative meaning, they are shared by other communicative systems, unstable and open-ended.

2.3.1 Connotative meaning is shared by other communicative systems

Connotative meaning can be seen in words that, when used, convey a certain impression, feeling, or judgment that does not always correspond to their denotative meaning. According to Chaer (2014:292), connotative meaning is an additional meaning that arises from the feelings or impressions associated with a word, whether from individuals or society as a whole. Although some words have the same denotative meaning, the emotional value they evoke can vary depending on the social and cultural context in which they are used. For example, the word "*mawar*" or "rose" denotatively refers to a specific type of flower with distinctive color and fragrance. However, connotatively, the word "*mawar*" is often used to symbolize love, tenderness, or beauty, as human experience frequently associates roses with feelings of affection.

2.3.2 Connotative meaning is unstable

Connotative meaning is peripheral compared with conceptual meaning is that connotations are relatively unstable: that is, they vary



considerably, as we have seen, according to culture, historical period, and the experience of the individual. For example, the word “politics” is originally neutral, referring simply to governmental activities. However, over time, it often gains negative connotations, as it is frequently associated with corruption, power struggles, and personal interests. This shows that connotative meaning is never fixed but always follows the dynamics of social and cultural life.

2.3.3 Connotative meaning is open-ended

Connotative meanings are also open-ended. This means that their meanings can vary depending on who interprets them and the context in which the word is used. This openness can differ from one person to another, even in the same context, depending on their personal experiences, environment, and communication. For example, the word “*merah*” or “red” may mean courage, perseverance, or enthusiasm to one person, but to another, it may have a different meaning such as anger, emotion, or even love depending on the context in which it is used.

2.4 Social Media

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as internet-based applications built on Web 2.0 technologies that allow users to create, share, and exchange content. Boyd and Ellison also describe social media as online platforms that enable individuals to construct public or semi-public profiles, connect with others, and navigate lists of connections. Social media has thus become an important aspect of modern communication and identity expression, making it a relevant subject for linguistic analysis. Each platform has its own focus, such as Instagram for photos, TikTok for videos, and Twitter for text-based interaction. However, all of them serve the same general function: to connect people in digital spaces and facilitate the sharing of messages, meanings, and cultural values.

2.4.1 Instagram

Instagram, launched in 2010 by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger, is a social media

platform primarily focused on sharing visual content such as photos and videos. It was later acquired by Meta (formerly Facebook) and expanded with features like Stories, Reels, Live, and Shopping. Instagram allows users to post content with filters, hashtags, and geotags, which can be shared publicly or privately. The platform has also become a space for online communities, influencers, and businesses, making it not only a social tool but also a marketplace. For linguistic research, Instagram provides a rich source of data through captions, comments, and hashtags, which often contain both denotative and connotative meanings shaped by cultural and social contexts.

2.4.2 Twitter

Twitter, founded in 2006 by Jack Dorsey and his team, is a microblogging platform where users share short posts called tweets. Initially limited to 140 characters and later extended to 280, Twitter is known for its fast-paced interaction through tweets, retweets, replies, and trending topics. The platform has become a central space for public discourse, ranging from personal expression to political debates. Its brevity encourages the use of figurative, implied, and connotative language, making it an ideal platform for studying language dynamics. Twitter’s open and interactive nature also makes it a valuable data source for analyzing how users convey meanings, particularly connotative meanings, in online communication.

3. Research Method

In this section, the object of research is presented in general terms. The object of this research is the use of connotative meanings in social media comments, particularly on Twitter and Instagram. The study focuses on how language is used to convey implied messages, such as emotions, sarcasm, or indirect criticism, which cannot be interpreted literally. This research applies a descriptive qualitative method because it aims to describe and explain the connotative meanings that appear in comments. The descriptive qualitative method does not employ numerical data but emphasizes meaning as



the core of analysis. According to Abdussamad (2021), qualitative research is conducted on natural objects with the researcher as the main instrument, and the final results highlight meaning rather than numbers or generalizations. The steps of this research consist of collecting, grouping, and analyzing the data. The data are collected from comments on public Twitter and Instagram accounts using documentation techniques and purposive sampling. The selected comments are grouped according to their connotative meaning characteristics. Finally, the data are analyzed inductively to explain how implied meanings emerge and function in the social context of communication.

4. Result and Discussion

From the analysis of comments on social media, it appears that the connotative meanings that emerge reflect three main characteristics, namely shared by other communicative systems, unstable, and open-ended. These three characteristics arise because everyone has a different way of using language, depending on their feelings, situation, and perspective. This research finds 51 data from Instagram and Twitter. 17 comments belong to the first characteristic, 16 belongs to the second, and the rest belongs to the third.

4.1 Connotative meaning is shared by other communicative systems

This section discusses the results of social media comment analysis that reveal emotional connotative characteristics, i.e., meanings that convey specific feelings to readers. These feelings can be positive or negative, the characteristics arise because connotations inherently carry the writer's attitudes, emotions, and values implied in words or phrase. The analysis shows how social media users deliberately choose certain expressions to convey their emotions toward a post, whether explicitly or implicitly.

Data 1



Figure 1:
Instagram post

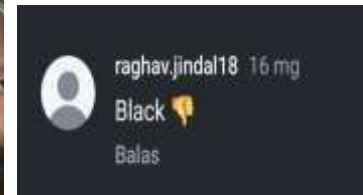


Figure 2: Comment on
post

The data analyzed consist of comments on social media posts featuring photos of people with black skin. In one of these posts, a user writes the comment “Black 🖤,” accompanied by a thumbs-down emoji. The comment “Black 🖤” is an example of an expression that has a connotative meaning with emotional characteristics. Denotatively, the word “Black” only describes the color black, while the thumbs-down emoji indicates a symbol of dislike or rejection. However, connotatively, this comment implies more than just color; its meaning depends on the context of the post being commented on. This comment clearly conveys a negative emotional impression in the form of ridicule or rejection of the person who is the subject of the post.

The choice of the word “Black,” which refers to skin color, combined with a symbol “🖤” indicating a negative judgment, shows that the commenter intends to convey feelings of dislike or contempt toward the black individual in the post. This demonstrates the emotional characteristics of connotative meaning, where the expressions used carry the writer's feelings and attitudes, implicitly conveyed through words and symbols. Thus, this comment illustrates how connotative meaning serves as a medium for subtly conveying negative emotions in social media communication.



Data 2



Figure 3: Instagram post



Figure 4: Comment on post

The comment “*Bidadari turun darimana nih* 😍😍😍 Masha Allah” on this social media post is an example of an expression that has a connotative meaning with positive emotional characteristics. Denotatively, the word “*bidadari*” refers to a beautiful creature from heaven, “*turun*” indicates movement from above to below, the heart-eyed face emoji “😍” conveys a sense of falling in love, and the religious expression “*Masha Allah*” is used to express awe at God’s creation. However, connotatively, this comment does not literally refer to angels from heaven descending, but rather serves as praise filled with admiration for the person in the post who is perceived as extremely beautiful and captivating.

The choice of the word “*bidadari*,” which symbolizes the perfection of beauty, combined with the falling in love emoji and the religious expression of awe, indicates that the writer aims to convey feelings of admiration, awe, and praise in a poetic manner. This reflects the emotionally positive characteristics of connotative meaning, where the expressions used convey the writer’s feelings of admiration and appreciation implicitly through words, symbols, and expressions. Thus, this comment illustrates how connotative meaning serves as a means to subtly convey positive emotions in social media communication.

Data 3



Figure 5: Instagram post



Figure 6: Comment on post

The comment “*Lutfi si green forest dan selalu* 😊” found on this social media post is an example of an expression with connotative meaning and positive emotional characteristics. Denotatively, the phrase “*green forest*” refers to a green forest, and the phrase “*dan selalu*” indicate consistency, while the emoji “😊” symbolizes a friendly smile. However, connotatively, the expression “*green forest*” is not intended to literally refer to a physical green forest or the color green, but rather to describe someone’s nature as being like a green forest, calming, cool, natural, and refreshing to others. This expression is used metaphorically to praise Lutfi’s consistent nature, which is calming and pleasant to those around him.

The choice of the phrase “*green forest*,” which symbolizes calmness and coolness, along with the use of the friendly smile emoji “😊” indicates that the commenter aims to convey admiration, comfort, and appreciation for Lutfi’s nature in a subtle manner. This reflects the characteristics of connotative meaning that is emotionally positive, where the expression used conveys feelings of admiration and appreciation for someone’s nature implicitly through words, symbols, and expressions.

4.2 Connotative meaning is unstable

In addition to having emotional characteristics, connotative meaning also has a characteristic known as unstable. This characteristic indicates that connotative meaning is not fixed but changes depending on who interprets it and in what situation the word is used. This occurs because connotative meaning is greatly influenced by differences



in cultural background, social values, and even the passage of time.

Data 1



Figure 7: Instagram post



Figure 8: Comment on post

The comment “yashhh Xarendulll, slaaayyy 🤩” has a connotative meaning that is complimentary in nature, using a style of expression typical of social media. Denotatively, words such as “slaaayyy” literally mean “to kill.” However, in contemporary context, the expression is used connotatively to indicate that someone is exceptionally captivating, confident, and successful in capturing attention, much like a diva. The word “yashhh” and the “🤩” emoji further emphasize a dramatic, flamboyant, and self-assured style, suggesting that the young child named Xarendulll in the photo appears extraordinary, stylish, and iconic.

This connotative meaning demonstrates the characteristic of meaning instability, as it can be interpreted differently depending on who is reading it. For some people, this comment is clearly a sincere compliment following the hype of social media language. For others, this comment may sound excessive, just a joke, or even sarcastic because it comments on a little kid in a way that is usually used for celebrities. There are also readers who just think it's funny without any serious meaning.

Data 2



Figure 9: Twitter post



Figure 10: Comment on post

The comment “polisi kok krempeng, pendek pula” has a connotative meaning that

is a satire on the authority and image of the police. Denotatively, “kerempeng” means very thin, and “pendek” means short in stature. But here, the two words do not just refer to physical condition, but satirize the fact that the two police officers in the photo do not look as handsome, strong, or convincing as one would expect from law enforcement officers.

The connotation of this comment is that police officers should have an authoritative and formidable appearance, as they symbolize strength, protection, and discipline. By calling them “kerempeng” and “pendek”, the commenter indirectly demeans their dignity, as if they are unworthy of wearing the uniform because their physical appearance does not align with the significant role and responsibilities they carry.

However, the meaning of this comment can also be interpreted differently. Some find it humorous, as a light-hearted joke about police body standards. Others see it as a serious critique of the quality of police recruitment. Meanwhile, others may view it as a cruel and demeaning comment based solely on physical appearance.

Data 3



Figure 11: Instagram post



Figure 12: Comment on post

The comment “tai kucing” has a connotative meaning that implies sarcasm toward something considered excessive or unserious in the post above. Denotatively, “tai kucing” means cat feces, which is synonymous with something dirty, trivial, and worthless. However, in this context, the expression is used connotatively to mock the content of the post, which seems overly dramatic, excessively romantic, or, in slang terms, “alay.” For the commenter, this expression is a way to express that the writing feels funny rather than touching or serious.



The connotative meaning of this comment reflects the characteristic of meaning instability, as it can be interpreted differently depending on who reads it. Some readers see it as a light-hearted joke to humorously comment on a post that is too romantic. Others perceive it as a sharp, rude, and disrespectful criticism of the post's author's feelings. Meanwhile, some readers may simply see it as a spontaneous expression without any specific intent, merely following the playful style common on social media. In this case, the connotative meaning lies between humorous, sarcastic, or even mocking, depending on how people interpret it. This instability of meaning clearly demonstrates the characteristic of meaning instability in the comment.

4.3 Connotative meaning is open-ended

Connotative meaning is also open-ended, meaning that each person can interpret it differently. This is only natural because everyone has different experiences, feelings, perspectives, and backgrounds. Therefore, a single word or sentence can be understood differently by different readers. Such as, on social media, some people write comments just for fun, but others may interpret them as insults.

Data 1



Figure 13: Instagram post



Figure 14: Comment on post

In the post above, the image of a father helping a small child as the boat they are on catches fire carries a connotative meaning filled with emotion. The comment “*mengandung bawang*” literally refers to something that actually contains onions. However, in a connotative sense, this expression is used to describe a heartwarming situation that makes people who see it feel like crying, like eyes stinging from onions. In this context, the father's brave and caring act

of saving the child moved many people with his sincerity.

This comment also shows how a simple metaphor can represent a great deal of emotion. Everyone who reads the post may feel differently some may just feel admiration, while others may be so moved that they cry along with the story. Here, the subjective nature of connotative meaning becomes evident, as the sense of emotion people feel when witnessing such a moment can vary depending on their experiences and perspectives. This expression is simple, yet it accurately captures the empathy, sadness, and admiration for the father's bravery.

Data 2



Figure 15: Instagram post



Figure 16: Comment on post

The comment “*bang nada 🤔🤔🤔 megang pasar mana, bang? (bertanya dgn nada dering)*” on that post has a connotative meaning that is both humorous and admiring. Denotatively, the sentence seems to be asking about the location of a market managed by someone named “*Bang Nada*”, complete with a playful tone of “*bertanya dgn nada dering.*” However, connotatively, the comment is actually a humorous and casual jab at the woman's strong and confident appearance, to the point where she is mistaken for a tough guy or a market boss with significant influence. This expression also conveys both admiration and surprise, as it is rare to see a woman with such a muscular build and confident posture. The comment demonstrates how connotative meanings often contain light hearted humor with a positive tone, while subtly incorporating hidden praise that makes the post more lively and engaging.



Data 3



Figure 17:
Twitter post



Figure 18: Comment on
post

The comment “And you really slayed ¹⁰⁰” denotatively, the word ‘slay’ means “to kill” or “to defeat.” Connotatively, it is clearly not about that, but rather a compliment for someone's appearance who looks incredibly cool, confident, and charming at a wedding. The commenter is acknowledging that the person who posted the content truly gave her all and successfully “killed” the atmosphere with her charms.

This meaning feels subjective because readers may interpret it with different nuances. So a simple word like “slay” can carry a wide range of meanings, depending on the experience, feelings, and perspective of the person receiving the message.

5. Conclusion

From the analysis of comments on social media, it appears that connotative meanings have three main characteristics: shared by other communicative systems, unstable, and open-ended. These characteristics arise because everyone uses language differently, depending on their feelings, situation, and perspective. Shared by other communicative systems is seen in comments that express feelings indirectly, such as admiration, humor, sadness, or discomfort. This shows that language on social media often conveys emotions subtly without saying them directly.

Connotative meaning is also unstable, since one comment can be understood differently by different people depending on their experience and knowledge. This makes connotative meaning never truly fixed. In addition, comments often reflect open-ended, where writers express more of their own feelings and opinions. Therefore, connotative meaning in social media comments is not just about language, but also a reflection of

personal perspectives and experiences of each user.

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