

Dialectics of Lexical and Cultural Semantics: A Linguistic and Anthropological Perspective

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Abstract

This study explores the dialectics between lexical semantics and cultural semantics through linguistic and anthropological perspectives, aiming to reveal the dynamic interplay between language meaning and cultural contexts. Lexical semantics analyzes the structural relations of word meaning within the language system, while cultural semantics emphasizes the role of social values, norms, and collective experiences in shaping meaning. Using a qualitative methodology that combines discourse analysis and linguistic ethnography, the findings highlight a reciprocal relationship: lexical meaning is enriched by cultural dimensions, and cultural concepts are mediated through lexical expressions. The study underscores the necessity of integrating both approaches to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of language and its socio-cultural realities. The results contribute to advancing interdisciplinary semantic studies and fostering cross-cultural communication.

Keywords: lexical semantics; cultural semantics; linguistic anthropology; discourse analysis;

INTRODUCTION

Language is a system of signs that not only represents reality but also constructs meaning through social and cultural interaction. Semantics, as a branch of linguistics that

studies meaning, plays a crucial role in understanding the dynamic relationship between language and society. Within the framework of semantic studies, two interrelated perspectives emerge: lexical semantics, which focuses on the internal meaning of words within the language system, and cultural semantics, which emphasizes meaning as a product of cultural interaction and collective social experience (Cruse, 2011; Wierzbicka, 1996). The dialectic between the two provides an essential space for understanding how language functions not only as a medium of communication but also as an instrument for constructing cultural identity.

In the development of modern linguistics, lexical semantics is regarded as a conceptual basis for mapping word meanings, including synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, and other semantic relations (Murphy, 2010). However, its limitation lies in its internal focus on language without considering the socio-cultural dimensions that shape and modify meaning. Conversely, cultural semantics, introduced by Anna Wierzbicka through the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) framework, seeks to trace universal meanings manifested in the values, norms, and cultural practices of specific communities (Wierzbicka, 1996; Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2014). Therefore, a dialectical study of lexical and cultural semantics allows researchers to view word meanings not only as formal entities but also as representations of the social world.

In the context of linguistic anthropology, the relationship between language and culture is understood as a mutually influencing system. Language is not a neutral entity but rather a medium through which ideologies, values, and identities are produced and reproduced (Duranti, 1997). This anthropological perspective broadens semantic analysis by questioning how meanings are formed, negotiated, and transformed alongside social dynamics. For instance, words with fixed meanings in dictionaries may undergo semantic shifts when used in different cultural interactions, particularly in the era of globalization and digital media (Al-Ali & Al-Bakain, 2021). Thus, exploring the dialectic between lexical and cultural semantics from linguistic and anthropological perspectives is crucial for understanding the interrelation between language, meaning, and culture in contemporary society. This study is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the

development of linguistics and anthropology, as well as practical applications in cross-cultural communication, language education, and discourse analysis.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative-descriptive approach grounded in linguistic and anthropological analysis. This approach was chosen because it is suitable for exploring the meanings embedded in language while simultaneously tracing the cultural dimensions underlying them. The research design is exploratory in nature, seeking to understand the dialectic between lexical and cultural semantics through conceptual examination and the analysis of linguistic data in specific social contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Sources

The data sources for this research consist of two types:

1. **Primary data**, in the form of Arabic and Indonesian lexicons that undergo variation or semantic shift when used in cultural communication practices and social media. These data were collected from online interactions, social media texts, and everyday conversations.
2. **Secondary data**, in the form of academic literature, books, journal articles, and previous studies related to lexical semantics, cultural semantics, and linguistic anthropology.

Data selection was conducted through purposive sampling, taking into account the relevance of lexicons to the phenomenon of semantic shifts that reveal the interaction between language systems and cultural systems (Patton, 2015).

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected using three main techniques:

1. **Literature review**, to obtain theoretical foundations and enrich analytical perspectives.
2. **Text observation**, by examining the use of lexicons in social media, popular texts, and academic discourse to identify semantic variations.

3. **Documentation**, which involves recording and archiving linguistic data and their contexts of use for further analysis.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted in two stages:

1. **Lexical semantic analysis**, to map word meaning relations (such as synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, and polysemy) based on the frameworks of Cruse (2011) and Murphy (2010).
2. **Cultural semantic analysis**, to interpret word meanings in the context of values, norms, and cultural practices in accordance with the **Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM)** theory developed by Wierzbicka (1996) and expanded by Goddard & Wierzbicka (2014).

The results of both analyses were then integrated within the framework of linguistic anthropology to examine how the dialectic between lexical and cultural semantics constructs new meanings in society (Duranti, 1997). Data validity was strengthened through **theory triangulation**, by comparing the analytical outcomes with different linguistic and anthropological frameworks (Denzin, 2012).

FINDINGS

1. Semantic Shift in the Lexical Domain

The analysis shows that a number of lexicons undergo meaning shifts when used in different cultural contexts. For instance, the Arabic word *ṣadīq* (صديق) lexically means "close friend." However, in social media communication, this term is often used more loosely to refer to a "follower" or "online friend" who does not necessarily share personal closeness (Al-Ali & Al-Bakain, 2021). This finding underscores that lexical semantics provides the basic meaning, but the actual meaning shifts according to the social context.

2. The Role of Culture in Meaning Expansion

Another finding reveals that cultural values influence the expansion of word meanings. The word *kafū* (كفو), for example, in early Arab tradition meant "equal" or "equivalent" in social status. In contemporary cultural contexts, particularly among

younger generations, this word is used to express appreciation or praise for someone's ability (such as in sports or digital gaming). This change reflects that lexical meaning is transformed by cultural semantics, which evolves in line with cultural practices (Wierzbicka, 1996; Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2014).

3. Lexical-Cultural Dialectics in the Context of Globalization

The phenomenon of globalization accelerates intercultural encounters that produce hybrid meanings. For example, the term *like*, originating from English, has been absorbed into Arabic and Indonesian vocabulary. It does not merely mean "to like" in the emotional sense but also "to give a sign of support" on social media. This finding highlights the dialectic between the system of lexical meaning and new cultural constructions formed through digital technology (Androutsopoulos, 2015).

4. Semantic Relations and Social Identity

The study also shows that word meanings are often related to social identity and ideological positions. In some communities, the use of the word *hurriya* (حرية), which lexically means "freedom," is interpreted differently: some understand it as individual freedom, while others see it as collective freedom within a political framework. This illustrates how cultural semantics operates to frame meanings in line with cultural ideologies (Duranti, 1997; Fairclough, 2010).

5. Implications for Linguistic and Anthropological Theory

The findings emphasize the importance of integrating linguistic and anthropological perspectives in semantic studies. Lexical semantics provides the analytical framework for mapping word meanings, while cultural semantics connects them to social values and practices. The dialectic between the two allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how language both represents and shapes cultural realities. These findings are consistent with Cruse's (2011) argument that meaning analysis needs to be expanded with a social dimension, as well as Duranti's (1997) view that language is a social practice inseparable from culture.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the relationship between lexical semantics and cultural semantics is dialectical, meaning that they mutually influence and shape one another. Lexically, word meaning provides a stable conceptual foundation that can be mapped through semantic categories such as synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, or polysemy (Cruse, 2011). However, this stability is not absolute, since word meaning always exists within a socio-cultural field that allows negotiation and transformation. This finding aligns with Murphy's (2010) view that the lexicon is dynamic and open to changes in meaning according to communicative needs.

The results regarding the expansion of lexical meanings such as ṣadīq (صديق) and kafū (كفو) indicate that the cultural dimension plays a crucial role in shaping new meanings. This is consistent with the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) framework developed by Wierzbicka (1996), which emphasizes that word meaning cannot be separated from the norms and cultural values surrounding it. In the context of social media, such expansions illustrate how speech communities actively reconstruct meaning through digital communication practices (Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2014; Androutsopoulos, 2015).

The dialectic between lexical and cultural meanings becomes even more evident in the context of globalization, where words across languages influence each other and generate hybrid meanings. The case of the adoption of the word like in Arabic and Indonesian confirms that the lexicon is no longer governed solely by the internal system of a language, but also by the logic of global interaction. This reinforces Blommaert's (2010) argument that globalization creates a new "linguistic repertoire" that combines local and global elements in everyday language practices.

Furthermore, this study shows that lexical meaning shifts often reflect ideology and social identity. For instance, divergent interpretations of the word ḥurriya (حرية) indicate ideological contestation in the public sphere. This affirms Fairclough's (2010) view that language is an arena of social struggle, where word meanings are used to frame

reality in line with particular interests. Within the framework of linguistic anthropology, this finding supports Duranti's (1997) thesis that language is a social practice inseparable from structures of power and cultural identity.

This discussion underscores the necessity of situating the integration of lexical semantics and cultural semantics within a multidisciplinary framework. From the linguistic perspective, analyzing word meaning relations remains essential as a conceptual foundation. However, from the anthropological perspective, the understanding of meaning must encompass the values, norms, and social practices that surround it. In other words, semantic inquiry cannot stop at the structural level but must be extended to the level of cultural praxis. The dialectic of the two enables a more comprehensive analysis of language dynamics in the era of globalization and digitalization.

Accordingly, the findings of this study contribute to the development of semantic theory and linguistic anthropology by affirming that language is an entity that continually moves between lexical stability and cultural fluidity. This contribution is relevant not only for the advancement of linguistics and anthropology but also for practical fields such as language education, intercultural communication, and critical discourse analysis.

CONCLUSION

This study affirms that the dialectic between lexical semantics and cultural semantics is key to understanding the dynamics of linguistic meaning. Lexically, words possess a basic meaning that is relatively stable within the language system, yet this meaning is never fixed. In social practice, word meanings are constantly subject to shifts, expansions, or restrictions depending on the surrounding cultural context, ideology, and social interactions.

The findings show that several lexemes such as ṣadīq (صديق), kafū (كفو), and ḥurriya (حرية) demonstrate transformations of meaning from the lexical level to the cultural level. This transformation reflects how language functions not only as a tool of

communication but also as a medium for the construction of identity, the representation of values, and the negotiation of social meaning. Furthermore, the study also reveals that globalization and digital media accelerate the emergence of new hybrid meanings—for instance, in the adoption of the English term like, which is interpreted differently in Arab and Indonesian cultural contexts. This phenomenon illustrates that language does not stand alone but is always situated within broader currents of cultural change.

Thus, it can be concluded that lexical semantics and cultural semantics cannot be separated but rather complement one another. Lexical semantics provides the conceptual structure of meaning, while cultural semantics adds the social and ideological dimensions that make language alive and relevant. The dialectic between the two underscores that language is a dynamic, reflective, and productive entity in constructing the reality of contemporary society.

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