THE IMPACT OF THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA YOUTUBE ON DENOTATIVE MEANING FROM A SEMANTIC PERSPECTIVE

Kesmi Veronika Simanjuntak
Universitas HKBP Nommensen Pematangsiantar
Bernieke Anggita Ristia Damanik
Universitas HKBP Nommensen Pematangsiantar
Alamat: Jl. Sangnawaluh No.4, Siopat Suhu, Kec. Siantar Tim., Kota Pematang Siantar, Sumatera Utara
Korespondensi penulis: kesmiveronika479@gmail.com[1], bernieke.damanik@uhn.ac.id[2]

Abstract This study explores the impact of YouTube as a social media platform on the interpretation of denotative meaning from a semantic perspective. While denotative meaning traditionally refers to the literal or dictionary definition of a word, the integration of multimodal features in YouTube—such as tone, visuals, music, and gestures—may cause shifts in how audiences perceive and interpret those meanings. Using a qualitative descriptive method, this research analyzes selected YouTube videos and their comment sections to examine how literal meanings are expressed by creators and understood by viewers. The findings show that multimodal elements often influence or even override the intended denotative meaning of words, leading to various audience interpretations. This highlights the fluidity of meaning in digital communication, where context and delivery can reshape even the most basic semantic elements. The study contributes to semantic analysis by demonstrating that denotative meaning in online platforms is no longer entirely fixed, and suggests the need for further interdisciplinary research involving semantics, pragmatics, and media discourse.
Keywords: Denotative Meaning, Semantics, Youtube, Social Media, Multimodal Discourse

Abstrak *Penelitian ini mengkaji dampak YouTube sebagai platform media sosial terhadap interpretasi makna denotatif dari perspektif semantik. Meskipun makna denotatif secara tradisional merujuk pada arti harfiah atau definisi kamus suatu kata, integrasi fitur multimodal di YouTube—seperti nada, visual, musik, dan gestur—dapat menyebabkan pergeseran dalam cara audiens memahami dan menafsirkan makna tersebut. Menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif, penelitian ini menganalisis video YouTube terpilih dan bagian komentarnya untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana makna literal diekspresikan oleh pembuat konten dan dipahami oleh penonton. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa elemen multimodal seringkali mempengaruhi atau bahkan menggantikan makna denotatif yang dimaksudkan dari kata-kata, menyebabkan berbagai interpretasi penonton. Hal ini menyoroti fleksibilitas makna dalam komunikasi digital, di mana konteks dan cara penyampaian dapat mengubah bahkan elemen semantik yang paling dasar. Studi ini berkontribusi pada analisis semantik dengan menunjukkan bahwa makna denotatif di platform online tidak lagi sepenuhnya tetap, dan menyarankan perlunya penelitian interdisipliner lebih lanjut yang melibatkan semantik, pragmatik, dan diskursus media.*
Kata Kunci: Makna Denotatif, Semantik, YouTube, Media Sosial, Diskursus Multimodal

INTRODUCTION

In the digital age, social media platforms have become dominant channels of communication, influencing not only how information is shared but also how meaning is constructed and interpreted. Among these platforms, YouTube stands out as a powerful medium that blends visual, auditory, and textual content, enabling users to convey messages in dynamic and multifaceted ways (Ginting, et al, 2023; Benson, 2016; Shoufan & Mohamed, 2022). As content creators, influencers, and audiences interact through videos, the traditional boundaries of language meaning, especially in terms of semantics, are increasingly being challenged and reshaped.

Semantics, as the study of meaning in language, distinguishes between denotative and connotative meanings (Purnamasari, 2018). Denotative meaning refers to the literal, dictionary definition of a word — its objective and universally recognized sense (Talan, et al, 2025). However, the use of language in YouTube videos often reveals how even denotative meanings can shift, expand, or become ambiguous depending on the context, visuals, tone, and audience interpretation. Through repeated exposure to certain phrases, hashtags, or visual language, viewers may begin to associate new or alternative meanings with otherwise neutral words.

This study aims to examine the impact of YouTube content on the interpretation of denotative meaning from a semantic point of view. By analyzing how words are used and understood in YouTube videos across different genres — such as vlogs, tutorials, commentary, and entertainment — the research explores the extent to which social media influences the fixedness or fluidity of meaning. In doing so, it sheds light on the evolving relationship between language, media, and meaning in the contemporary communication landscape.

Research Significance
1. Theoretical Significance
   This research contributes to the field of semantics by analyzing how denotative meanings—commonly considered fixed and objective—can be influenced by multimedia content on platforms like YouTube. It expands the understanding of how digital contexts affect literal language meaning, offering new insights into language interpretation in the era of social media.
2. Practical Significance
   The study provides valuable knowledge for educators, linguists, and content creators about the importance of maintaining clarity and awareness of meaning in digital communication. By understanding how literal meanings may shift in YouTube content, users can develop more effective and responsible communication strategies.
3. Social and Cultural Significance
   This research highlights the role of social media, especially YouTube, in shaping public understanding and usage of language. It reveals how everyday exposure to digital content can influence audience perceptions, potentially altering the common understanding of certain words and phrases even at the denotative level.

PREVIOUS WORKS
1. Semantics and Denotative Meaning
Semantics is a branch of linguistics that studies the meaning of words, phrases, and sentences. One of the core distinctions in semantics is between denotative and connotative meaning. Denotative meaning refers to the direct, literal, and commonly accepted definition of a word — the kind of meaning found in dictionaries (Lyons, 1995)

cited in Wibisono, et al, 2021). This contrasts with connotative meaning, which involves emotional or cultural associations attached to a word.

Several linguistic scholars, such as Leech (1981) cited in Sari (2023), have emphasized that denotative meaning is relatively stable across contexts. However, recent studies show that the boundaries between denotation and connotation can blur, particularly in dynamic environments like social media, where audiovisual cues influence interpretation.

2. Language and Social Media

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and especially YouTube have become central in shaping how language is used and interpreted (Apoko & Waluyo, 2025). Studies by Tagg (2015) and Crystal (2011) highlight that the informal and participatory nature of social media communication encourages the creation of new meanings and the re-contextualization of existing terms.

YouTube, with its mix of spoken language, visuals, music, and comments, offers a unique multimodal setting where meaning is not only conveyed through words but also through images and context (Nasution, 2019). As a result, even literal meanings can shift depending on how they are presented. For instance, a neutral term like "clean" may take on a sarcastic or ironic tone depending on the speaker's facial expression or background visuals.

3. YouTube's Influence on Semantic Interpretation

Several recent studies have investigated how YouTube influences language and meaning. For example, a study by KhosraviNik (2018) found that YouTube videos play a significant role in shaping discourse, particularly in political and cultural topics, where word meanings are contested or reframed. Similarly, Lee and Drajati (2021) showed that YouTube comments often reinterpret the literal meanings of video titles based on viewer assumptions and emotional responses.These findings suggest that YouTube can mediate or even distort denotative meanings depending on content delivery, context, and audience engagement. This aligns with multimodal discourse analysis, which posits that meaning is constructed not just by words but also by how those words are embedded in context (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

4. Research Gap

While many studies have explored the influence of social media on connotative meanings and discourse practices, fewer have specifically examined how denotative meanings are affected — especially from a semantic linguistic perspective. Most research has focused on slang, metaphor, or connotation. Therefore, this study aims to fill that gap by focusing explicitly on how literal meanings are understood and possibly altered through YouTube content.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative descriptive research design. The aim is to describe and analyze how denotative meanings are presented, shifted, or interpreted in YouTube videos from a semantic perspective. Qualitative research is appropriate because the focus is on understanding meaning, context, and interpretation rather than measuring numerical data.

1. **Data Source**

The primary data source is YouTube videos selected from different genres such as vlogs, tutorials, commentary, and entertainment. Videos are selected based on their high engagement (views, likes, and comments) and frequent use of specific words or phrases with clear denotative meanings that may be influenced by visual or contextual elements.In addition, YouTube user comments related to the videos are also analyzed to understand how viewers interpret the meanings presented by the content creators.

2. **Data Collection Techniques**

The data are collected through the following methods:
   a) Content Sampling: Selecting 5–10 YouTube videos that demonstrate varied uses of language where denotative meanings are central.
   b) Transcription: Transcribing the spoken language in the selected videos to analyze word usage.
   c) Observation and Note-taking: Watching the videos while noting contextual elements (visuals, tone, setting) that might affect semantic interpretation.
   d) Comment Analysis: Collecting and categorizing viewer comments that reflect interpretation or misinterpretation of the denotative meaning.

3. **Data Analysis Techniques**

The data are analyzed using semantic analysis and multimodal discourse analysis, including the following steps:
   a) Identification of key words or phrases with clear denotative meanings.
   b) Contextual Analysis of how those words are used in the video and supported (or contradicted) by visual or auditory cues.
   c) Interpretation of how the audience responds to those meanings based on comments.
   d) Comparison between the literal (dictionary) meaning of the words and the meaning perceived in the video context.

The findings are then interpreted to understand how social media content, particularly YouTube videos, influences the perception of denotative meaning.

4. **Research Instruments**

The main instruments used in this research are: Observation sheets for documenting language use in videos.Transcripts of video dialogues.Analytical frameworks based on semantic theory and multimodal analysis.

Research Subject

The subject of this research is YouTube video content, specifically focusing on how language—particularly words with clear denotative meanings—is used and

potentially reinterpreted through audiovisual presentation. The research also includes the audience interpretation, as reflected in the video comments section, to explore how viewers understand or respond to the literal meanings used in the videos.

The selected subjects include:

1. Content Creators

   YouTube creators from various genres (e.g., lifestyle vlogs, educational tutorials, entertainment, and commentary) whose language use shows potential shifts or creative reinterpretation of denotative meanings.

2. YouTube Videos

   Specific videos that include target vocabulary with denotative meanings that may be influenced by the video's visual, tonal, or situational context.

3. YouTube Viewers

   The viewers who engage with the content through comments, providing insight into how the audience perceives or possibly misinterprets the literal meanings used in the videos.

Research Object

The object of this research is the use of language in YouTube videos, with a specific focus on how denotative meanings of words are conveyed and interpreted within the context of audiovisual communication. This includes examining:

1. Words or phrases with denotative (literal) meanings that are used in the videos.
2. The way those meanings are influenced by contextual elements such as tone of voice, facial expressions, background visuals, and editing styles.
3. Audience interpretations of those denotative meanings as shown through comments or reactions in the comment section.

By focusing on these elements, the research aims to explore how the semantic understanding of literal word meanings can be maintained, shifted, or blurred in the YouTube environment — a platform where communication occurs through multiple modes beyond just spoken or written language.

The Technique of Data Analysis

The data analysis in this research is conducted using a qualitative semantic analysis approach, supported by multimodal discourse analysis. The aim is to understand how denotative meanings are presented, supported, or altered in YouTube videos. The following steps are applied:

1. Data Reduction

   The researcher selects and filters relevant data from the YouTube videos, focusing only on words or expressions with clear denotative meanings. Non-relevant parts (e.g., unrelated segments of the video or off-topic comments) are excluded.

2. Identification of Denotative Terms

   Key words or phrases are identified in the transcripts of the selected videos. These words are compared with their standard dictionary definitions to establish their original denotative meaning.

3. Contextual Analysis

Each word is then analyzed within the context of the video, taking into account : Visual elements (e.g., images, actions, facial expressions) Audio elements (e.g., tone, music, background sounds)Speaker intention or delivery style. This step uses elements of multimodal discourse analysis to understand how meaning is constructed beyond text.

4. Audience Interpretation

   Viewer comments are analyzed to explore how the audience interprets or responds to the denotative meanings used. These interpretations are categorized (e.g., correct understanding, misinterpretation, ironic use).

5. Interpretation and Conclusion

   After analyzing all data, the researcher interprets whether and how the denotative meanings are affected by YouTube's multimedia context. Patterns and conclusions are drawn about the relationship between social media

DATA ANALYSIS

Denotative

This section presents an analysis of how denotative meanings are used and interpreted in selected YouTube videos. The researcher selected five YouTube videos from different genres (e.g., vlogs, tutorials, commentary) and identified words or phrases with clear denotative meanings.

Example:

In a YouTube cooking tutorial, the word "hot" is used to describe temperature. However, based on tone, background music, and camera focus on the cook's expression, some viewers in the comments interpret it as referring to attractiveness (a connotative shift).

The analysis followed the steps of:

- Transcribing the video content
- Identifying denotative terms
- Comparing them to dictionary definitions
- Analyzing contextual presentation (tone, visuals, gestures)
- Analyzing comments and user reactions

This process revealed that meaning can shift depending on multimodal cues, even when the word is used with its literal intent.

FINDINGS

From the analysis of five YouTube videos and corresponding comments, the following findings emerged:

1. Denotative meanings are influenced by visual and auditory context.

   Even words with clear dictionary meanings can be reinterpreted depending on how they are visually and emotionally delivered.

2. Audience interpretation varies significantly.

Some viewers perceive the literal meaning, while others infer sarcastic or humorous interpretations based on tone or imagery.

3. Certain genres (e.g., satire, commentary) are more likely to distort denotative meaning. These videos often rely on irony, exaggeration, or visual metaphors, which can blur the original meaning of words.
4. Multimodal elements (tone, expression, visuals) act as semantic modifiers. These elements often override the literal meaning and guide the viewer's interpretation in a particular direction.

DISCUSSION

The findings support the idea that denotative meaning is not always fixed in digital communication environments like YouTube. Although denotation is supposed to represent the "literal" meaning, the presence of multimodal features—such as imagery, tone, facial expressions, and background sound—can cause audiences to reinterpret these meanings either intentionally or unintentionally.This supports theories in multimodal discourse analysis (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), which emphasize that meaning is co-constructed through multiple channels, not just verbal language. Additionally, the interaction between creator and audience plays a major role in reshaping meaning, aligning with the views of pragmatics and discourse studies.Thus, YouTube does not just serve as a content-sharing platform, but also as a semantic space where the boundaries between denotation and connotation are constantly negotiated and redefined.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study reveal that the use of social media, particularly YouTube, significantly influences the understanding and interpretation of denotative meaning from a semantic perspective. Although denotative meaning refers to the literal or dictionary meaning of a word, the communication environment provided by YouTube—through its combination of spoken language, visual imagery, music, and tone—often alters the way viewers perceive that meaning. In various examples analyzed in this study, it was found that words meant to be interpreted literally were often reinterpreted by viewers due to non-verbal cues such as facial expressions, sarcastic tone, or situational irony. This indicates that meaning, even at its most basic level, is not entirely stable in digital contexts where multimodal communication dominates. YouTube, therefore, serves not only as a platform for information delivery but also as a dynamic space where literal meanings are shaped and reshaped through audience interaction and content presentation. This research contributes to the broader field of semantics by showing that denotative meanings are susceptible to contextual influences, and that the boundary between denotation and connotation is more fluid in modern, digital discourse than in traditional, text-based communication.

SUGGESTION

In light of the findings, several suggestions can be offered to different stakeholders involved in language use and study. First, for linguists and researchers, it is recommended to extend the scope of semantic studies into other social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, or live-streaming services where similar multimodal influences may occur, and to compare how different platforms affect the stability of denotative meanings. Second, for educators and language instructors, integrating real-life examples from YouTube into language learning can help students better understand how meaning shifts depending on context. This is especially valuable in teaching pragmatics, semantics, and discourse analysis. Third, YouTube content creators should be more conscious of how their delivery—such as tone, visuals, and editing choices—can influence the audience's interpretation of their language. Even when the intent is to communicate something literally, added elements in video production may unintentionally change the message. Finally, future researchers are encouraged to adopt interdisciplinary approaches that combine semantic theory with pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and media studies to gain a fuller understanding of meaning construction in digital communication. By doing so, researchers can provide more nuanced insights into how language evolves in response to the rapidly changing landscape of online interaction.

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