

## Semantic Aspects of Spoken Interaction in the English Department at Bali Dwipa University

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### Abstract

This article, titled *Semantic Aspects of Spoken Interaction in the English Department at Bali Dwipa University*, investigates how meaning is constructed and conveyed through students' everyday spoken communication. The main objective is to examine the semantic elements present in their conversations and to reveal the types of meaning relations that commonly appear in their speech. The data were obtained from spontaneous verbal exchanges among 20 undergraduate students (mean age = 20.8), all of whom were intermediate to advanced users of English and agreed to participate in the study. To gather the data, the researcher employed a non-participant observational technique, supported by audio recordings and brief observational notes. The recorded interactions were later transcribed and examined using a qualitative descriptive framework that emphasized semantic relations, including sense-reference distinctions and lexical meaning patterns. The analysis showed that the most prominent semantic relations used by the students were synonymy, hyponymy, and polysemy. Additionally, many utterances relied heavily on shared situational knowledge, highlighting the significant role of contextual reference and pragmatic reasoning in maintaining smooth interaction. Overall, the study demonstrates that students' spoken discourse is influenced by both their choice of semantic forms and the context in which these forms are used. These insights imply that incorporating semantic-focused learning activities may help students strengthen their communicative abilities and deepen their awareness of how meaning functions in actual spoken situations. The outcomes of this research can also assist lecturers in developing instructional strategies that draw attention to semantic aspects of spoken language.

**Keywords:** Semantic Relation, Spoken Interaction, Lexical Meaning, Contextual Reference, English Department Students

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## **1. Introduction**

Language is a medium for communicating human ideas (Zumala et al., 2025). Language serves as a medium for communicating messages, whether through spoken or written means (Zulaikah et al., 2024). Language comprehension involves both sub-lexical (e.g., phonological) and lexical-semantic processing (Reyes-Aguilar et al., 2023). Language operates not merely as a vehicle for storytelling but as a complex system laden with symbolic, emotional, and cultural weight (Wie et al., 2025). Language as a communication tool will be closely related to the field of semantic linguistics which is a branch of linguistics that learn about the meaning of a language (Agustinus Givano, 2023). The investigation of meaning in spoken language has remained a central topic in linguistic studies, especially within semantic analysis. Meaning shapes how individuals understand one another and interpret messages during conversation. The language system is constantly in motion, enriched with new linguistic units (Irgashovna, 2024). In university settings where English functions both as a tool for academic study and everyday communication, spoken exchanges provide valuable insight into students developing language skills. These interactions show how learners select vocabulary, connect meanings, and depend on context when expressing ideas. The present study examines the semantic dimensions of spoken interaction among students in the English Department at Bali Dwipa University. It focuses on how meaning emerges from the use of lexical items, semantic relations, and context driven expressions. Within this research, semantic relations refer to patterns of meaning such as synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, polysemy, and meronymy, while spoken interaction refers to the natural conversations students engage in during class activities and informal discussions.

The way students shape meaning in conversation is essential to their communicative success because it influences how clearly and accurately messages are conveyed. Communication involves more than producing sentences; it requires interpreting information, drawing inferences, and relying on shared background knowledge. As a result, developing semantic awareness becomes important for improving both communication and academic performance. Foundational work by scholars such as (Griffiths, 2006) highlights the significance of understanding lexical relationships, reference, and context in meaning interpretation. Research on classroom talk also shows that discussions depend heavily on situational understanding and shared perspectives among participants. These observations underscore the active and dynamic nature of meaning in speech and reinforce the importance of studying semantic patterns in students spoken exchanges.

Despite the broad interest in semantics, much existing research focuses on written data or on interactions between teachers and students. Studies examining how university learners use semantic relations when communicating with peers remain relatively rare, particularly in the Indonesian tertiary context. Semantics is the branch of linguistics dealing with the meanings of words and sentences (Rohbiah, 2020). Research has often concentrated on vocabulary

learning, pragmatic features, or discourse organization, leaving limited attention to how semantic connections operate in spontaneous student conversations. This gap is important because peer interactions often reveal more natural, spontaneous, and authentic language use compared to structured classroom exchanges. Such conversations provide rich evidence of how context, interpersonal relationships, and communication goals shape meaning. Addressing this lack of research is necessary for achieving a fuller understanding of how learners construct meaning in everyday spoken communication.

To respond to this gap, the current study analyzes the types of semantic relations present in students' spoken communication and explores how these relations contribute to meaning making. In the realm of Semantics, understanding how words relate to one another plays a crucial role in ensuring effective communication (Nyoman & Tri, 2025). By examining genuine student conversations, the research aims to highlight the semantic strategies learners rely on when interacting with one another. The findings are expected to assist lecturers and curriculum designers in developing instructional activities that strengthen students' skills in constructing meaning through spoken English. In addition, the results may offer valuable insights for semantic theory by demonstrating how meaning functions in real-life academic communication. Through this investigation, the study aims to expand knowledge about students' semantic behavior and emphasize the importance of incorporating semantic competence into language education.

## **2. Method**

The research was carried out using a descriptive qualitative design aimed at exploring how meaning functions within students' spoken exchanges. This approach was selected because it provides the flexibility needed to closely observe language as it unfolds in actual communication and to interpret meanings that arise naturally in conversation. The investigation centered on tracing recurring forms of semantic relationships and how learners construct meaning based on context during their real-life interactions. The participants of this study were students from the English Department at Bali Dwipa University, whose conversations served as the primary source of data.

### **2.1 Research design**

This research utilizes a qualitative descriptive design to explore how semantic elements function within students' spoken communication in the English Department at Bali Dwipa University. This design is selected because it allows the researcher to observe and describe language as it naturally occurs, without altering the context in which interaction takes place. By using this approach, the study can carefully examine how students construct and convey meaning during real conversations.

The investigation centers on documenting and interpreting semantic features that arise in actual student discussions, such as patterns of sense relations, reference, context-dependent interpretations, and possible ambiguities. Spoken exchanges are examined in their authentic settings, providing a genuine representation of how semantic phenomena surface in everyday academic communication. Through this methodological framework, the study aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of how meaning is formed, negotiated, and interpreted by learners during spoken interaction in their regular learning environment.

## **2.2 Participants**

This investigation involved a group of undergraduate students enrolled in an English study program at a private higher education institution in Bali. A total of 20 learners participated in the study, selected purposively based on their active involvement in spoken English activities inside and outside the classroom. To protect their privacy, all individuals are referred to using pseudonyms such as *Participant 1*, *Participant 2*, and similar labels.

The students were between 19 and 22 years old, which represents the typical age range for undergraduate English majors. Their socioeconomic backgrounds varied, generally falling within the lower-middle to middle-income categories. Each participant had been learning English for at least six years, combining their formal education before entering university with their current academic coursework. This background ensured that they possessed adequate language proficiency for analyzing meaning in spoken exchanges.

The participants frequently engaged in discussions, collaborative tasks, and peer conversations conducted in English. This made them appropriate sources of data for exploring how semantic relations and meaning patterns appear in natural spoken interactions. Their involvement in both structured academic conversations and informal daily communication provided rich and authentic linguistic material for the study.

## **2.3 Data Collection**

The information used in this research was obtained through audio-based documentation and indirect observation, both chosen to capture student conversations in their natural form. A digital recording device served as the main tool for gathering spoken data, allowing the researcher to document learners' exchanges during classroom activities, small-group work, and informal conversations. Additional field notes were taken to complement the recordings by noting situational details, interactional patterns, and contextual elements that could influence how meaning was produced.

The collection process was carried out in several organized steps. Prior to recording, participants were informed about the purpose of the study and the procedures involved, and their consent was secured. Subsequently, spontaneous English conversations were recorded across a three-week period, with attention directed toward moments where students naturally used the language in academic settings as well as day-to-day interactions. The recordings were made discreetly so that the researcher's presence would not disrupt the authenticity of the communication.

Once all audio files had been gathered, the conversations were transcribed word-for-word to enable close semantic examination. These transcripts were then analyzed to locate examples of specific semantic features, including lexical selection, semantic relationships, referential expressions, ambiguity, and meanings shaped by conversational context. This structured approach to collecting data ensured access to rich and reliable linguistic material suitable for exploring the semantic characteristics of spoken interactions within the English Department at Bali Dwipa University.

## **2.4 Data Analysis**

The data were examined using a qualitative interpretive framework aimed at uncovering how students formed meaning during spoken exchanges. After the audio recordings were transcribed, the transcripts were reviewed several times to develop a broad sense of the semantic patterns present in the conversations. The researcher then applied thematic coding to highlight portions of the dialogue that demonstrated key semantic features, including lexical relationships, reference markers, ambiguous expressions, and meanings shaped by context.

During the coding stage, each relevant segment of speech was classified according to semantic categories derived from established linguistic theories. Occurrences of synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, polysemy, and shifts in contextual meaning were carefully labeled and grouped. The analysis also included identifying deixis, anaphoric references, and other devices students used to refer to people, objects, and ideas throughout the interaction. Utterances that showed signs of ambiguity or unclear meaning were examined more closely to determine how participants relied on situational cues to interpret the intended message.

After the codes were organized, patterns were compared across different communicative environments, such as formal academic discussions and everyday peer conversations. This comparison helped identify which semantic behaviors were consistently used by students and which varied depending on the interaction setting. To increase the accuracy of interpretation, the researcher cross-checked coded excerpts with the field notes, ensuring that contextual information and speaker intentions were accurately represented.

The final phase of analysis involved integrating the coded data into a broader explanation of how meaning is shaped and negotiated by students during spoken communication. These interpretations were then connected to relevant semantic and discourse theories to deepen the understanding of how lexical relations and contextual cues operate in real-time interactions among students in the English Department at Bali Dwipa University.

## **3. Findings**

### 3.1. Lexical Relations as Tools for Meaning Development

Across the dataset, students frequently drew upon various forms of lexical relations to shape, refine, and negotiate meaning while speaking.

#### a. Synonymy as a Repair and Clarification Strategy

Restating an idea with a different word occurred regularly, especially when students felt their original explanation was unclear.

Data Samples:

*“The character is very brave, I mean courageous.”*

*“It’s confusing, I mean unclear, the instruction.”*

These examples illustrate how students used synonyms to repair misunderstandings and ensure their messages were properly conveyed.

#### b. Antonymy Used to Contrast or Emphasize Ideas

Students often relied on opposites to strengthen their arguments or highlight distinctions.

*“It is not formal, it’s casual.”*

*“Not difficult, more easy if we follow the steps.”*

This pattern shows that antonymy helped them sharpen conceptual differences during interactive tasks.

#### c. Hyponymy for Giving Specific Examples

Learners frequently used category–subcategory relations when attempting to elaborate or provide detail.

*“Mammals like dogs, cats, dolphins.”*

*“Media such as video, audio, poster.”*

Such responses suggest that students used hyponymy to make abstract topics more concrete during peer interactions.

#### d. Polysemy and Contextual Interpretation

Words with multiple possible meanings occasionally led to confusion. When this occurred, students actively clarified which interpretation was intended.

*“Cool as in temperature or cool like attitude?”*

This indicates an awareness of context-dependent meaning and the need to check interpretations when ambiguity arises.

### 3.2. The Role of Deixis and Reference in Maintaining Coherence

All groups demonstrated heavy use of personal, spatial, and temporal deixis to organize ideas and link one utterance to the next.

#### a. Personal Deixis

Pronouns such as *I*, *we*, *they*, and *us* were used to express collective decisions and shared responsibility.

*“We think the character is selfish because he only cares about himself.”*

#### b. Spatial Deixis

Students frequently pointed to physical objects, slides, or screens using expressions like *here* and *there*.

*“This picture here shows the conflict.”*

#### c. Temporal Deixis

Time-related expressions helped students recall earlier lessons or sequence ideas.

*“We learned this last week, right?”*

Although deictic expressions contributed to fluent interactions, some were vague or lacked clear referents. Around 17% of the conversations showed students asking for additional clarification because words like *this*, *that*, or *they* were not specific enough.

### 3.3. Dependence on Shared Context and Background Knowledge

A considerable portion of students' utterances relied on implied information, shared experiences, or previous classroom events.

Examples:

*“You know the assignment from yesterday? That one.”*

*“Like the example from the lecturer earlier.”*

When students shared the same background knowledge, meaning flowed smoothly. However, misunderstandings emerged when some participants lacked the same context, resulting in short breakdowns in communication.

### 3.4. Strategies for Negotiating Meaning

Students showed active participation in resolving unclear expressions or unfamiliar vocabulary through several techniques:

asking for clarification (“What do you mean by *shift*?”)

rephrasing ideas (“So you mean the character changes?”)

giving examples (“For instance, when someone apologizes but is still angry...”)

supporting meaning nonverbally (gestures, pointing, intonation)

These behaviors demonstrate that students collaboratively work to achieve mutual understanding when meaning becomes uncertain.

### 3.5. Growth of Semantic and Pragmatic Awareness

Overall, the dataset indicates that students are developing the ability to interpret and construct meaning by considering:

context

speaker intention

lexical choices

shared assumptions

reference tracking

Although instances of ambiguity were still present, the students showed a growing awareness of how meaning functions in spoken interaction and used various strategies to maintain clarity.

#### **4. Discussion**

The findings of this study highlight the central role that semantic knowledge plays in shaping students' spoken communication. The frequent use of lexical relations such as synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, and polysemy suggests that learners actively draw on semantic networks to construct and clarify meaning. This aligns with the views of Cruse (2000) and Lyons (1995), who argue that semantic relations form the foundation of clear and coherent language use. In this study, students' ability to employ alternative lexical items or contrastive pairs indicates an emerging awareness of how meaning can be modified or reinforced through word choice. Such patterns suggest that semantic competence contributes significantly to communicative effectiveness in both academic and informal settings.

The findings also show that reference and deixis are crucial for maintaining coherence in spoken interaction. Students relied extensively on pronouns and deictic expressions to link their ideas and situate their statements within the interactional context. However, moments of referential ambiguity reveal that learners still face challenges in managing shared reference, particularly when contextual assumptions differ among participants. This supports Walsh's (2011) claim that spoken language requires constant negotiation of common ground, particularly in dynamic classroom environments where meanings shift rapidly across turns. These episodes of misunderstanding further emphasize the need for explicit training in referential clarity within communicative tasks.

Context-dependent meaning emerged as another key aspect of students' spoken exchanges. Many utterances were interpretable only when considered within the shared experiences of the participants, such as previous lessons, group activities, or ongoing academic tasks. This heavy reliance on implicit context reflects the pragmatic dimensions of meaning construction noted by Griffiths (2006). While this dependence shows that students are beginning to develop pragmatic sensitivity, it also indicates potential vulnerabilities: when contextual cues are missing or misinterpreted, meaning breakdowns are more likely to occur. This implies that learners would benefit from pedagogical activities that strengthen their ability to express meaning explicitly when necessary.

Finally, the active use of meaning negotiation strategies underscores the collaborative nature of spoken interaction among students. The practice of asking for clarification, restating ideas, and providing examples demonstrates that learners engage in cooperative efforts to maintain mutual understanding. Such strategies are consistent with interactional theories of language learning, which propose that communicative success emerges from joint construction of meaning. These findings suggest that spoken semantic competence is not merely an

individual skill but a shared process shaped by peer collaboration, interactional context, and linguistic awareness.

## 5. Conclusion

This study examined how students in the English Department at Bali Dwipa University construct and interpret meaning during spoken interactions. The analysis revealed that learners rely heavily on various semantic features, including lexical relations, reference systems, and context-based interpretations, to convey ideas and maintain conversational coherence. Their frequent use of synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, and polysemy indicates that semantic knowledge plays an essential role in shaping the clarity and precision of their spoken language. At the same time, the findings show that reference management, particularly through deictic expressions, is crucial for linking utterances and sustaining mutual understanding.

The study also demonstrated that contextual knowledge significantly influences how meaning is formed and interpreted. Students often depended on shared experiences or situational cues to make sense of each other's statements, highlighting the importance of pragmatic awareness in interaction. However, the reliance on implicit context occasionally led to misinterpretations, suggesting that learners still need to develop stronger strategies for expressing meaning explicitly when required. The presence of meaning negotiation strategies such as reformulation, clarification requests, and example-giving further suggests that spoken interaction is a collaborative process in which participants jointly refine and confirm meaning.

Overall, the findings emphasize that semantic competence is a crucial component of effective spoken communication. The interplay between linguistic knowledge, contextual awareness, and interactional strategies shapes how students construct meaning in real time. These results contribute to a deeper understanding of how learners use semantics in natural conversation and highlight the need for instructional practices that integrate semantic awareness with communicative activities. By fostering students' ability to manage reference, interpret context, and negotiate meaning, educators can better support the development of more effective and precise spoken communication skills.

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