

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presented the background, problems, objectives, significance, and limitation of the study.

1.1 Background

Language can be seen as an evolving system that continuously responds to the shifting dynamics of society. Throughout history, words have undergone transformations in meaning, application, and nuance a phenomenon referred to as semantic shift. This linguistic process, wherein vocabulary acquires new interpretations, loses prior definitions, or alters its grammatical role, has long been acknowledged as part of language's natural progression (Campbell, 2021). Such changes are typically influenced by a combination of cultural evolution, historical developments, technological innovation, and patterns of social interaction.

In recent years, the pace of semantic change has intensified due to rapid technological developments, particularly the emergence of the internet and social media. Digital platforms now serve not only as channels for exchanging information but also as fertile ground for linguistic innovation. Among these, Media X (formerly known as Twitter) plays a prominent role by enabling immediate, global communication. Its features such as conciseness, interactivity, the use of hashtags, meme dissemination, and trending topics have notably transformed how language is used and understood in online environments.

Words that once carried fixed, literal meanings are now interpreted variably depending on context. For example, tweet, which originally denoted a bird's sound, now predominantly refers to a short message posted on Media X. Similarly, viral, previously associated with the spread of disease, has been adapted to describe content that rapidly gains widespread attention. Additional examples include ghosting, which formerly described spectral phenomena but is now used to mean abruptly ending digital communication, and flex, which has shifted from its original meaning of muscle movement to signify boasting or showing off.

In this study, the word viral serves as a clear example of how semantic shifts occur in digital spaces. Traditionally, according to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) and Cambridge Dictionary, viral referred to anything “caused by, relating to, or of the nature of a virus” (OED, n.d.; Cambridge, n.d.). This medical usage emphasized its association with disease and biological infection. However, in modern digital contexts, particularly on Media X, the meaning of viral has broadened dramatically. It now refers to “content that spreads rapidly and widely across the internet, often through shares, retweets, or reposts” (Cambridge, n.d.). For instance, when users say “That video went viral overnight”, the word no longer carries a medical association, but instead highlights popularity, speed of circulation, and cultural impact.

This contrast between the traditional dictionary meaning and the modern digital usage illustrates a process of semantic broadening and metaphorical extension. The metaphor of infection rapid, uncontrollable spread has been transferred from the medical domain into digital culture, where information or media circulates in a similarly

uncontrollable way. Thus, viral exemplifies how social media accelerates semantic shifts, bridging traditional meaning rooted in biology with new symbolic meaning that reflects internet culture, influence, and global connectivity.

These cases highlight how digital culture reshapes language, often diverging from or even contradicting its traditional usage. Through user interaction and digital creativity on Media X, words undergo semantic changes driven by trends, humor, social commentary, irony, and internet meme culture. This reflects not only the playful reinvention of language but also a deeper shift in how people construct meaning, identity, and communication in the online sphere.

1.2 Problems of the Study

The Problems of the study were formulated in the following questions:

1. What are the most common types of semantic shifts found in English words used on Media X?
2. What are the factors affecting semantic shifts in English words on Media X?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Based on the problems, the objectives of this study were:

1. To identify and classify the most common types of semantic shifts found in English words used on Media X.
2. To analyze the factors influencing the occurrence of semantic shifts in English words on Media X.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is expected to provide both theoretical and practical significance:

1. Theoretical Significance

This research contributes to the field of linguistics, particularly in semantics and sociolinguistics, by offering insights into how semantic shifts occur in the context of digital communication. It helps to enrich the understanding of language change mechanisms, especially in online platforms like Media X. Social and Cultural Insights

2. Practical Significance

The findings of this study may be beneficial for various fields such as lexicography, translation, language teaching, and natural language processing (NLP). Understanding how meanings of words shift in modern usage can help linguists, translators, and AI developers better interpret language in real-world digital contexts. It also serves as a reference for future research on semantic development in digital media environments..

1.5 Scope and Limitation of the Study

This study focuses on the semantic shifts of English words as used on Media X, a digital communication platform formerly known as Twitter. The research specifically examines how certain English words have experienced changes in meaning when used in online discourse, with a particular emphasis on the comparison between their modern meanings and traditional ones.

The scope of this study is limited to English words that are frequently used and have shown noticeable semantic change within the Media X environment. The analysis

includes categorizing the types of semantic shifts (such as broadening, narrowing, amelioration, pejoration, and metaphorical extension), and identifying the social and linguistic factors that influence these changes.

This study does not focus on phonological or syntactic changes, nor does it cover other social media platforms. The findings are not intended to generalize all English usage in social media but are specifically confined to semantic developments observed within Media X.

