



Semantic Shift of English Loanwords in Indonesian Instagram Captions: A Digital Discourse Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates semantic shifts in selected English loanwords—healing, insecure, flexing, and toxic—as used in Indonesian Instagram captions from a digital discourse perspective. In the context of digital communication, loanwords are not only adopted but also undergo significant transformations influenced by social interaction, cultural practices, and users' communicative intentions. This research aims to identify the types of semantic shift and to explain how new meanings are constructed within digital discourse. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed, analyzing 124 Instagram captions posted from January to December 2025, which were collected through purposive sampling from public accounts. The data were examined using semantic change theories and contextual analysis within a digital discourse framework. The findings reveal that all selected loanwords undergo systematic semantic shifts with distinct patterns. The word healing shows semantic broadening, shifting from a medical concept to a broader representation of leisure and emotional well-being. Insecure undergoes semantic narrowing, being restricted mainly to self-confidence issues and social comparison. Meanwhile, flexing demonstrates pejoration, developing negative connotations associated with showing off wealth or lifestyle. The word toxic undergoes a metaphorical shift, extending from its literal meaning of physical poison to abstract meanings related to harmful relationships and environments. Furthermore, the findings highlight that meaning construction is shaped by social interaction, identity expression, and communicative practices within digital discourse. This study demonstrates that semantic shift is not only a linguistic process but also a sociocultural phenomenon actively constructed in digital communication environments.

Keywords: semantic shift, English loanwords, Indonesian instagram captions, digital discourse perspective

Pergeseran Makna Kata Serapan Bahasa Inggris dalam Caption Instagram Berbahasa Indonesia: Perspektif Wacana Digital

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji perubahan makna (semantic shift) pada English loanwords yaitu healing, insecure, flexing, dan toxic dalam caption Instagram berbahasa Indonesia dari perspektif wacana digital. Dalam konteks komunikasi digital, loanwords tidak hanya diadopsi, tetapi juga mengalami perubahan makna signifikan yang dipengaruhi oleh interaksi sosial, praktik budaya, serta tujuan komunikatif pengguna. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi jenis perubahan makna serta menjelaskan bagaimana makna baru terbentuk dalam wacana digital. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan menganalisis 124 caption Instagram dalam rentang waktu Januari hingga Desember 2025, yang dikumpulkan melalui teknik purposive sampling dari akun publik. Data dianalisis menggunakan teori perubahan makna dan pendekatan kontekstual dalam kerangka wacana digital untuk mengidentifikasi pola perubahan makna. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa seluruh loanwords mengalami perubahan makna dengan pola yang berbeda. Kata healing mengalami perluasan makna (broadening) dari konsep medis menjadi representasi aktivitas rekreasi dan kesejahteraan emosional. Kata insecure mengalami penyempitan makna (narrowing) yang terbatas pada rasa tidak percaya diri dan perbandingan sosial. Sementara itu, flexing mengalami pejorasi, yaitu perubahan makna ke arah konotasi negatif yang berkaitan dengan perilaku pamer. Kata toxic mengalami pergeseran makna metaforis, dari makna literal menjadi makna abstrak yang menggambarkan hubungan dan lingkungan yang merugikan. Selain itu, penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa makna baru terbentuk melalui interaksi sosial, ekspresi identitas, serta praktik komunikatif dalam wacana digital. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa perubahan makna tidak hanya merupakan fenomena linguistik, tetapi juga fenomena sosiokultural yang secara aktif dikonstruksi dalam lingkungan komunikasi digital.

Keywords: pergeseran makna, kata serapan, bahasa Inggris, caption instagram, berbahasa Indonesia, perspektif wacana digital

Submitted
24/04/2026

Accepted
27/04/2026

Published
30/04/2026

Citation	Juwita, N. J. (2026). Semantic Shift of English Loanwords in Indonesian Instagram Captions: A Digital Discourse Perspective. <i>Jurnal Pembelajaran Bahasa dan Sastra, Volume 5, Nomor 2, Maret 2026, 1837-1846</i> . DOI: https://doi.org/10.55909/jpbs.v5i2.1410
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Publisher
Raja Zulkarnain Education Foundation

INTRODUCTION

Language has become a dynamic and continuously evolving system that adapts to social, cultural, and technological changes. In the current digital era, language development has become increasingly rapid and complex, particularly with the emergence of social media platforms such as Instagram, which enable users to communicate widely and instantly. One notable linguistic phenomenon in this context is the increasing use of loanwords from English in everyday communication, especially in social media captions.

The use of loanwords not only reflects the influence of globalization but also demonstrates the creativity of language users in adapting and modifying word meanings according to local contexts. In practice, words such as *healing*, *insecure*, *flexing*, and *toxic* are frequently used by Indonesian Instagram users with meanings that differ from their original meanings in English. On the other hand, language use in social media can be understood as part of digital discourse, which refers to the practice of using language in technology-mediated communication. In this context, language functions not only as a means of conveying information but also as a tool for constructing identity, expressing emotions, and representing users' social experiences. According to Androustopoulos (2015) digital discourse is characterized by its dynamic and creative nature, and it is strongly influenced by social interactions occurring within digital environments. In line with this, Jones et al., (2015) argue that language practices in digital media enable continuous negotiation of meaning, allowing the meanings of words to shift and evolve depending on their contexts of use. Therefore, the phenomenon of semantic change in loanwords found in Instagram captions cannot be separated from the broader context of digital discourse, which shapes and influences how social media users construct meaning through language.

This phenomenon leads to what is known in semantic studies as semantic shift. Semantics, as a branch of linguistics concerned with meaning,

plays an important role in explaining how the meaning of a word can change and be interpreted in various communicative contexts. In the context of language use on social media, such meaning shifts can enrich users' expressions but may also create ambiguity depending on the situation and interpretation (Wanto, 2025; Ruchban et al., 2025; Zakaria, 2024). According to Leech, (1981), meaning change can occur in various forms, such as broadening, narrowing, and pejoration.

Meanwhile, Yule (2022) emphasizes that linguistic meaning is highly dependent on usage context and social interaction. In social media contexts, word meanings are often reinterpreted due to influences such as trends, popular culture, and users' expressive needs. In line with Crystal (2011) explains that language in digital media tends to be innovative and flexible, allowing rapid and widespread semantic changes. This is clearly evident in the use of loanwords on Instagram, where such words are not only borrowed but also undergo significant transformations in meaning.

In linguistic studies, loanwords are the result of language contact, enabling a language to adopt lexical elements from another language to fulfill communicative needs. According to Durkin (2014), borrowing is the process of taking linguistic elements from a source language into a recipient language, both in form and meaning. In practice, the use of loanwords is often influenced by social factors, such as the need for new terms (need-filling motive) and the prestige associated with foreign languages (Hockett, 1963). Along with the borrowing process, semantic shift becomes an inseparable phenomenon. Hockett (1963) states that lexical borrowing inherently involves meaning change due to adaptation to cultural contexts and usage in the recipient language. Therefore, the meaning of borrowed words is not always identical to their original meanings.

In semantic studies, meaning change can be classified into several main types. Traugott & Dasher (2001) argue that semantic change involves processes such as generalization (broadening), specialization (narrowing), and shifts in meaning



over time. Additionally, Bloomfield (1995) explains that meaning change may also occur through metaphorical mechanisms, where a word acquires a new meaning based on conceptual similarity between the old and new meanings. Currently, research on semantic change in loanwords across various contexts has been widely conducted. However, studies specifically analyzing semantic shifts of loanwords in Instagram captions in Indonesia remain relatively limited, particularly those focusing systematically on types of semantic shift within digital communication contexts. This study is based on this phenomenon and aims to examine in depth how English loanwords undergo semantic shifts when used in Instagram captions by Indonesian users. Specifically, this research focuses on four highly popular words in everyday social media usage: *healing*, *insecure*, *flexing*, and *toxic*. These words are selected due to their high frequency of use and strong indications of semantic change.

The research questions of this study are: what types of semantic changes occur in these loanwords, and how are these new meanings constructed within the context of social media usage? Accordingly, this study aims to identify the types of semantic shifts and analyze the factors influencing these changes. This research is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it may enrich studies in semantics and sociolinguistics, particularly regarding meaning change in digital contexts. Practically, it may help readers understand how language evolves in social media and raise awareness of loanword usage in everyday communication. Furthermore, this study may serve as a reference for future researchers interested in examining linguistic phenomena in digital contexts.

In recent years, the phenomenon of semantic change in loanwords within digital contexts has attracted considerable attention from linguistic researchers. Several studies indicate that language use on social media not only reflects everyday communication but also serves as a primary space

for meaning change. For instance, research by (Tagliamonte & Denis, 2008) reveals that language in online communication changes rapidly due to social factors and user identity. The study highlights that digital media enables the emergence of new language variations, including reinterpretations of word meanings. Another study more specifically related to loanwords was conducted by Crystal (2011), who states that English as a global lingua franca often undergoes local adaptation when used in different cultural contexts. In this regard, loanwords are not only borrowed lexically but also experience semantic changes according to users' communicative needs. This is supported by Bell (2002), who demonstrates that language use is highly influenced by audience and social context, leading to variations in meaning depending on communicative purposes.

In the Indonesian context, several studies have also examined similar phenomena. For example, Wijana (2015) found that English loanwords in Indonesian often undergo semantic shifts due to local cultural influences. Additionally, Firayani (2025) shows that the use of English loanwords in youth slang exhibits various forms of semantic shift, such as narrowing, broadening, and amelioration, influenced by digital interaction, popular culture, and identity construction on social media. This study emphasizes that meaning change occurs not only at the linguistic level but is also closely related to social dynamics and communication practices in digital spaces.

Another study by Anam & Nirmala (2019) found that English loanwords in Indonesian mass media, particularly newspaper headlines, undergo various types of semantic change such as widening, narrowing, metaphor, pejoration, and amelioration. The study also reveals that loanword usage is influenced by factors such as communicative efficiency, modernity, and linguistic prestige. These findings indicate that semantic change in loanwords is a systematic phenomenon closely related to communicative functions in specific contexts.

Nevertheless, most previous studies have focused on loanword usage in general or on particular social media platforms without in-depth analysis of the types of semantic shifts involved. Moreover, studies specifically analyzing semantic shifts in Instagram captions in Indonesia using a semantic approach remain limited. However, previous studies have not systematically examined the types of semantic shift in specific loanwords within Indonesian Instagram captions, particularly by combining semantic classification with sociocultural interpretation. Therefore, this research aims to fill this gap by systematically analyzing the types of semantic shifts in loanwords and how these meanings are constructed within the context of Instagram usage.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at understanding and explaining the phenomenon of semantic shift in the use of loanwords within digital communication contexts. A qualitative approach is chosen because the study focuses on interpreting meaning based on language use in context rather than on numerical measurement. According to Franekel et al., (2012), Creswell (2014), McMillan (2004), qualitative research seeks to explore and understand meanings derived from social phenomena through in-depth data interpretation. The data in this study consist of Instagram captions containing English loanwords, specifically healing, insecure, flexing, and toxic.

The data were collected from publicly available Instagram captions posted between January and December 2025. The data were collected using purposive sampling, a technique in which data are selected based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. This technique ensures that the data accurately represent the phenomenon of semantic shift under investigation.

Data collection was conducted through documentation methods by gathering captions from public Instagram accounts that contain the selected

words. This method was chosen because it enables the researcher to obtain authentic data used in everyday communication on social media. According to Sugiyono (2016), Razzak (2017), Afifuddin & Saeban (2002), documentation is an effective technique for collecting textual and contextual data.

The data were analyzed qualitatively by applying the interactive analysis model proposed by Miles et al. (2014), which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, the researcher identified and selected data relevant to the research focus. The data were then classified based on the types of semantic shift observed, such as broadening, narrowing, and metaphorical shift. In the data display stage, the results of the analysis were organized systematically to facilitate interpretation. The final stage involved drawing conclusions by interpreting meaning based on the context of use in Instagram captions.

In addition, this study adopts a contextual approach to meaning analysis as proposed by Yule (2022), which emphasizes that the meaning of a word cannot be understood independently of its context of use. Therefore, each data point is analyzed by considering the communicative situation, the purpose of use, and the intended meaning conveyed by the user. This study also adopts a digital discourse perspective to understand how new meanings are constructed through language use in social media contexts.

RESULT

1. Overview of the Data

This study analyzes a total of 124 Instagram captions containing four English loanwords, namely healing, insecure, flexing, and toxic. The data were collected from public Instagram accounts using purposive sampling to ensure their relevance to the research objectives. To provide an overview of the data distribution, the following table presents the frequency and the dominant types of semantic shift observed.



This is a distribution of loanwords and their types of semantic shift. First, 46 loanwords of the healing type have a dominant shift type of broadening. Second, 30 loanwords of the insecure type have a dominant shift type of narrowing. Third, 21 loanwords of the flexing type have a dominant shift type of pejoration. Fourth, 27 loanwords of the toxic type have a dominant shift type of metaphorical shift.

The table above shows that all analyzed loanwords undergo semantic change, with variations in the types of semantic shift observed. This indicates that the use of loanwords in Instagram captions is not merely a process of lexical adoption, but also involves the reinterpretation of meaning influenced by social and digital cultural contexts.

2. Semantic Shift of Healing

The word *healing* is the most frequently occurring loanword in this study, with a total of 46 occurrences recorded between January and December 2025. Based on the data analysis, all occurrences of this word exhibit a pattern of semantic broadening. Lexically, in English, *healing* refers to the process of recovery from physical or psychological conditions. However, in the context of Instagram captions, this meaning undergoes a significant expansion. The data show that the word is used to represent various non-medical activities, such as traveling, relaxation, spending time with family, and enjoying nature.

An example of its usage can be seen as follows:

“Healing time Explore Kuningan” (Data 4)

“Healing time with cousins” (Data 48)

“Nge-charge energi di tempat yang tepat #healingtime” (Data 16)

In this context, *healing* no longer refers to a medical recovery process, but rather functions as an expression of lifestyle associated with emotional relief and recreation. This indicates that the meaning of the word *healing* has expanded from a specific context to a broader and more abstract usage.

The emergence of this broadened meaning indicates that the semantic shift of *healing* is constructed through the reinterpretation of emotional recovery within the framework of contemporary lifestyle practices. In the context of Instagram, users tend to associate well-being not only with medical or psychological recovery but also with leisure activities such as traveling, relaxation, and social interaction. This shift is strongly influenced by digital culture, where expressions of self-care and emotional balance are commonly represented through visually appealing experiences. Therefore, the new meaning of *healing* is not merely a linguistic extension, but also a socially constructed concept shaped by users' need to express emotional states in a simplified and relatable way.

3. Semantic Shift of Insecure

The word *insecure* occurs 30 times within the period from January to December 2025. Based on the data analysis, this term exhibits a pattern of semantic narrowing. In English, *insecure* generally carries a broad range of meanings, encompassing conditions of insecurity, uncertainty, and instability. However, within the context of Instagram usage, its meaning undergoes a considerable narrowing. The data indicate that *insecure* is predominantly used to refer to specific psychological conditions, particularly those related to self-confidence and social comparison.

Several examples of its usage include:

“Stop insecure” (Data 38)

“warna kulitku... aku terlalu insecure” (Data 37)

“gimana ga insecure, cakep semua” (Data 60)

In this context, the meaning of *insecure* no longer covers its full original semantic range but is instead restricted to emotional aspects and self-perception. Therefore, a reduction in meaning occurs, shifting from a general concept to a more specific one.

The narrowing of meaning in *insecure* demonstrates that semantic shift is shaped by

dominant themes in social media interaction, particularly those related to self-image and social comparison. In Instagram discourse, users frequently engage in evaluative practices by comparing physical appearance, lifestyle, and personal achievements. As a result, the word *insecure* becomes strongly associated with psychological conditions such as lack of confidence and feelings of inferiority. This indicates that the new meaning is constructed through repeated contextual usage, where the broader meaning of insecurity is reduced to a specific emotional experience that is highly relevant to digital self-presentation and identity formation.

4. Semantic Shift of Flexing

Within the period from January to December 2025, the word flexing was identified 21 times. The analysis indicates a pattern of pejoration, referring to a shift in meaning toward a negative connotation. In English, flexing literally denotes a physical action, such as showing one's muscles. However, in the context of social media in Indonesia, the term has undergone a significant semantic shift. Flexing is used to describe the act of displaying wealth, luxury items, or a particular lifestyle, which is often perceived negatively by the public.

Examples of usage include:

“Unboxing tas baru cek... #flexingladies”
(Data 27)

“aku bukan mau flexing” (Data 28)

“Ikutan flexing aaah... pamer MoGe,
Rubicon, Yacht” (Data 54)

These data indicate that the word *flexing* has undergone a semantic shift that is not only descriptive but also evaluative, as it carries social judgment toward the behavior of users.

The pejorative shift of *flexing* reflects how semantic change is influenced by social evaluation and collective attitudes within digital communities.

In this context, the act of displaying wealth or luxury is often interpreted negatively, leading to the development of a new meaning that carries implicit criticism. The construction of this meaning is shaped by users' awareness of social norms and the tendency to judge excessive self-presentation as undesirable. Consequently, *flexing* evolves from a neutral physical action into a socially loaded term that represents arrogance or superficiality. This transformation highlights the role of social perception in redefining word meanings in online communication.

5. Semantic Shift of Toxic

Within the same period (January–December 2025), the word toxic appeared 27 times. The analysis reveals a pattern of metaphorical shift. Literally, toxic means ‘poisonous’ or containing harmful substances. However, in the context of Instagram captions among Indonesian users, the term is used metaphorically to describe social conditions and interpersonal relationships that are emotionally or psychologically harmful.

Examples of usage include:

· “4 tipe bos toxic ini bikin mau resign” (Data 52)

· “toxic workplace and toxic workmates”
(Data 63)

· “keluarga toxic” (Data 65)

In this case, the meaning of *toxic* shifts from the physical domain to an abstract domain, indicating a process of conceptualizing meaning through metaphor.

The metaphorical shift of *toxic* illustrates how abstract meanings are constructed through conceptual mapping from physical to social domains. In Instagram discourse, users extend the literal meaning of toxicity as something harmful or poisonous to describe interpersonal relationships and environments that negatively affect emotional well-being. This shift is formed through metaphorical thinking, where harmful social experiences are conceptualized in terms of physical danger. The frequent use of this term in various



relational contexts indicates that the new meaning is collectively understood and reinforced through repeated usage, making it a conventional expression in digital communication.

DISCUSSION

From a digital discourse perspective, the semantic shifts identified in this study illustrate how language users actively construct new meanings within online communication environments. The findings of this study indicate that English loanwords used in Indonesian-language Instagram captions undergo systematic semantic shifts. These changes are not merely linguistic phenomena; rather, they are closely related to social practices, cultural dynamics, and communication patterns within digital environments. Therefore, this discussion is analyzed from two main perspectives: the linguistic perspective and the sociocultural perspective. From a linguistic standpoint, the types of semantic change identified in this study namely broadening, narrowing, pejoration, and metaphorical shift—are consistent with established theories of semantic change. According to (Bloomfield, 1995), meaning change may occur through processes such as widening (broadening) and narrowing. This is reflected in the words *healing* and *insecure* found in this study. The word *healing* has undergone semantic broadening, shifting from a strictly medical concept to a broader meaning that includes recreational activities and emotional recovery. This finding is consistent with (Geeraerts, 2009), who explains that semantic broadening occurs when a word extends its meaning to cover a wider range of contexts. In contrast, the word *insecure* demonstrates semantic narrowing, where its originally broad meaning becomes more specific, referring particularly to feelings of low self-confidence and social comparison.

Furthermore, the semantic shift observed in the word *toxic* represents a metaphorical extension, involving a transfer of meaning from the physical domain to the abstract domain. Literally meaning

“poisonous,” the word *toxic* is now used to describe emotionally harmful relationships or social environments. This phenomenon corresponds with (Bloomfield, 1995) classification of metaphor as a type of semantic change based on conceptual similarity. Meanwhile, the word *flexing* exhibits pejoration, a shift toward a negative connotation. Originally referring to the physical act of bending or tightening muscles, the term has developed into a socially evaluative expression associated with showing off or excessive self-display. However, from a sociocultural perspective, these semantic changes cannot be separated from the influence of social media as a digital communication space. The use of the word *healing* as a representation of lifestyle reflects a meaning construction shaped by popular cultural trends, particularly the concepts of self-care and emotional well-being. This is in line with (Crystal, 2011), who suggests that language in digital contexts tends to be innovative and flexible, allowing users to reconstruct meaning according to communicative needs.

In addition, the narrowing of the word *insecure* is closely related to identity construction in social media. Platforms such as Instagram encourage users to present idealized self-images, thereby fostering social comparison practices. In this context, the use of the word *insecure* reflects psychological experiences related to self-perception and social standards. This supports the view of (Darvin & Norton, 2015), who argue that language use in digital spaces is closely linked to identity formation and self-representation. The semantic shift in the word *flexing* can also be understood as a reflection of social norms within digital communities. In social media culture, showing off is often negatively perceived, leading the term *flexing* to develop into an expression carrying social criticism. This is supported by (Androutsopoulos, 2015), who states that language practices in online communities are influenced by social interaction and collective attitudes.

Meanwhile, the metaphorical use of the word *toxic* demonstrates how language users construct

meaning through social experience. By transferring the concept of “poison” into interpersonal contexts, users are able to express emotional experiences more concisely and powerfully. This indicates that semantic change is not only a linguistic process but also involves cognitive and social mechanisms in interpreting reality. These findings are also consistent with previous studies. Firayani (2025) found that loanwords in colloquial language undergo various types of semantic change influenced by social interaction and digital culture. Similarly, Anam & Nirmala (2019) demonstrated that loanwords in Indonesian media experience semantic changes such as broadening, narrowing, and metaphorical shift as a result of communicative needs and contextual usage. However, this study contributes uniquely by specifically analyzing loanwords in Instagram captions, thereby providing a more focused understanding of the role of social media in shaping semantic change.

Overall, the findings suggest that semantic change in loanwords results from the interaction between linguistic and sociocultural factors. Linguistic theory explains the patterns and types of change, while social factors explain how and why these changes occur in actual communication practices. Thus, language in digital contexts is not only dynamic but also actively shaped by users according to their needs and experiences. These findings suggest that social media does not merely reflect language change but actively accelerates and shapes semantic innovation, positioning users as agents of meaning construction

CONCLUSION

This study aims to identify the forms of semantic change in English loanwords used in Indonesian-language Instagram captions and to explain how these new meanings are constructed within digital communication contexts. Based on the analysis of 124 data points, collected through purposive sampling from January to December 2025, all examined loanwords were found to undergo semantic change in different patterns:

broadening in healing, narrowing in insecure, pejoration in flexing, and metaphorical shift in toxic. These findings indicate that semantic change occurs systematically rather than randomly. Furthermore, the study reveals that the new meanings of these loanwords are formed through processes of reinterpretation influenced by their usage in social media contexts. Instagram users actively construct meanings based on their experiences, expressive needs, and digital communication trends. In this regard, meaning is not solely determined by lexical definitions but also by social interaction, popular culture, and evolving communicative practices in digital spaces.

The findings imply that semantic change in loanwords cannot be fully understood through a purely linguistic approach; it must also be examined from a sociocultural perspective. Social media functions as a space that accelerates semantic change while simultaneously serving as a platform where language users collectively construct and negotiate new meanings. However, this study is limited by the number of data and its focus on only four loanwords. Therefore, future research is recommended to analyze a wider range of loanwords and to compare their usage across different social media platforms in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of semantic change in digital contexts.

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