Semantic Analysis of Lexical Relations in College Students Interaction

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A B S T R A C T

Communication competence is the crucial aspect in communication activities, especially in the college. Therefore, college students must have a sufficient competence in communication including English communication skills. As one of the English communication skills, particulary in Semantics, the ability of using lexical relation is important. Based on that phenomena, this study tries to explore the semantic analysis of lexical relations in college students' interactions to uncover the ways meaning is constructed and conveyed in everyday academic communication. By examining spoken and written exchanges among students, the research focuses on identifying types of lexical relations, including synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, meronymy, and collocation. The data were collected through recorded group discussions. A qualitative approach was employed to analyze the lexical choices. Findings reveal that students frequently use synonymy and collocation to ensure clarity and fluency in their conversations, while antonymy and hyponymy are used to emphasize contrast and specificity. The study highlights the importance of raising awareness of semantic relationships in language use, especially in academic discourse, to improve communication competence among students. This research contributes to the field of Semantics by providing insights into how lexical relations shape meaning in real life academic interactions and offers implications for language teaching.

Introduction

Language is not only a medium for communication, but also a fundamental tool for constructing meaning in social and academic contexts. In the realm of Semantics, understanding how words relate to one another plays a crucial role in ensuring effective communication. Semantics is the study of meaning, of the structural ways in which it is realized in natural language and of the formal logical properties of these structures (Aloni & Dekker, 2016). Relations like synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, meronymy, and collocation play a crucial role in how people interpret and categorize the world they live in (Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2014). For college students, especially those in English departments, understanding lexical knowledge is crucial not just for building vocabulary, but also for developing clear and structured academic writing (Homme, 2020).

In lexical relations there are lexical meanings. Lexical meaning is composed of smaller meaningful parts or it is the meaning from the dictionary directly (Rohbiah, 2020). By using Semantics approach, the information in lexical meanings can be revealed properly (Hadiwijaya, 2019). The studies on lexical relations in Semantics has shown the significance progress over the past decade. Lexicons in lexical meanings can have positive and negative prosodies depending on the context (Nabu, 2020). There are three kinds of lexical semantic found on the lyric of song "Be Careful on The Road" by Tulus, such as, repetition, synonym, and antonym (M. Edwards, 2022). There are six lexical semantic relations in the ColdPlay's album "A Head Full of Dream" by using Saeed's

idea, for instance, synonyms, antonyms, polysemy, homonym, hyponym, and meronyms (Harefa & Pasaribu, 2023). Entailment occur freely with propositional synonymy (Taher & Salih, 2023). The uses of lexical meanings in the headline newspaper of The Jakarta Post like synonymy and hyponymy are to avoid misinterpreting the proposition of the reader's interpretation (Nurmayana & Nasution, 2022). The rhetorical devices in Charles Dicken's A Tale of Two Cities use antonymy to explain antithesis created by a conflict of different semantically contradictory phrases (Jabrael, 2024). Although previous research has explored lexical relations across a variety of domains such as song lyrics, literary works, and media content, little attention has been given to their spontaneous use in real-life communication among students. Therefore, this current study seeks to address that gap by examining how different types of lexical relations, namely synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, meronymy, and collocation. They are utilized in the natural spoken discourse of college students. The findings aim to uncover how these semantic elements contribute to the construction of meaning in daily academic conversations.

This research aims to investigate the semantic application of lexical relations within student interactions by examining real-life academic conversations, feedback sessions, and written communication. Building on the work of the contextual nature of meaning, this study explores how different lexical relations are employed to enhance clarity, express opinions, or manage disagreement (Saeed, 2016). By drawing attention to the semantic choices made by students, the study not only contributes to semantic theory but also offers pedagogical implications for curriculum designers and educators seeking to improve students' communicative competence through enhanced lexical awareness.

Research Method

This research employed a qualitative descriptive method to analyze the use of lexical relations such as synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, meronymy, and collocation in the interactions of English Department students at Bali Dwipa University. The qualitative descriptive approach is a structured way to examine qualitative data that focuses on providing a direct and detailed account of a phenomenon, as shared or observed from participants' experiences, without relying on deep theoretical analysis (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014).

In analyzing the data, this study adopted the three-phase framework of qualitative data analysis which includes data reduction, data organization, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014). Initially, the spoken and written exchanges of English Department students were transcribed and closely examined. Instances of lexical relations, such as synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, meronymy, and collocation then systematically identified and categorized through a coding process that assigned labels based on the type of lexical relation used. This allowed for the simplification and structuring of the data into meaningful units. After coding, the findings were arranged into charts and tables to illustrate how frequently each lexical relation occurred and in which contexts, allowing patterns to become more visible. The final step involved interpreting these patterns to formulate insights, for example, recognizing antonymy as a rhetorical tool in discussions while ensuring the validity of the conclusions through cross-checking, peer consultation, and careful re-analysis of the original data to avoid bias or overgeneralization.

Result and Discussion

30 participants were intentionally chosen using purposive sampling, a common approach in qualitative studies aimed at selecting individuals who fulfill particular research-related requirements. These participants were undergraduate students from the English Department at Bali Dwipa University, selected based on their regular engagement in speaking-based coursework during the academic period under review. Their background in both spoken English and foundational semantic knowledge, especially in areas such as synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, meronymy, and collocation that made them appropriate contributors to the focus of this study. The group size also provided sufficient flexibility for repeated practice and thorough qualitative investigation.

Once the participants were confirmed, the data collection process was initiated through structured speaking exercises held in the classroom. These sessions took place once a week over a four-week period, amounting to four separate speaking drills. The interactions recorded during these drills formed the primary data set for the study. From these sessions, data segments that reflected lexical relationships were extracted and examined. These samples were then sorted into five distinct semantic categories: synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, meronymy, and collocation. Each identified lexical relation was subsequently explored through relevant theoretical frameworks to better understand how such semantic features were reflected in the participants' actual language use. All of those things described as follows:

Table 1. Use of Synonymy in Students' Spoken Interactions

No.	Utterance	Type of Synonymy	Function of Use	Contextual Notes
a	"The explanation is clear, it's understandable."	Near-synonyms	Emphasis, reinforcement	Clarifying meaning in academic context
b	"It's a hard task, very difficult."	Paraphrased synonyms	Strengthening intensity	Expressing challenge level
c	"He was upset, I mean sad."	Emotional synonymy	Clarification, emotional accuracy	Adjusting tone for emotional nuance
d	"We need to act, we have to do something."	Functional synonymy (modality)	Urgency, obligation	Expressing social responsibility
e	"The lecture was boring, kind of dull."	Subjective synonyms	Personal opinion, emotive tone	Evaluative classroom reflection
f	"She's a friendly person, really kind."	Social/emotive synonymy	Positive characterization	Describing interpersonal traits
g	"The problem or issue is serious."	Formal/academic synonymy	Precision, formal tone	Academic language use
h	"It's wrong, even incorrect."	Judgment-based synonymy	Emphasis, correctness	Strong evaluative judgment
i	"We reached a conclusion, or decision."	Conceptual synonymy	Clarity and elaboration	Academic summary or report
j	"The answer is easy, I mean simple."	Simplified synonymy	Accessibility, student-friendly restatement	Peer explanation in a learning setting

1. Synonymy

It was used by the students to clarify or restate meaning. There were 10 synonymy utterances as follows:

a. "The explanation is clear, it's understandable."
Analysis:
The terms *clear* and *understandable* are used together to emphasize mental clarity. They serve as near-equivalents that enhance the overall message.
Interpretation:
This use of repetition supports mutual understanding between speaker and listener. It reflects the student's effort to convey the idea accurately and to confirm their comprehension of the material.
b. "It's a hard task, very difficult."
Analysis:
The learner uses *hard* alongside *difficult* to stress how demanding the task feels.
Interpretation:
The pairing amplifies the emotional tone and reveals a language-learning habit using similar expressions side by side to gain fluency and add emphasis.
c. "He was upset, I mean sad."
Analysis:
In this sentence, the speaker substitutes *upset* with *sad* as a clarification.
Interpretation:
This self-correction indicates a desire for greater precision in conveying feelings. It shows the student's growing ability to distinguish subtle differences in emotional vocabulary.
d. "We need to act, we have to do something."
Analysis:
Expressions like *need to act* and *have to do something* both communicate urgency and responsibility.
Interpretation:
This indicates the speaker's intention to highlight the importance of taking action, and it also shows how different modal structures can express similar meanings.
e. "The lecture was boring, kind of dull."
Analysis:
Here, *boring* and *dull* function as similar descriptive words used to evaluate an experience.
Interpretation:
The softener *kind of* implies personal opinion. The combination of these synonyms provides a subjective evaluation and adds personal tone to the speaker's feedback.
f. "She's a friendly person, really kind."
Analysis:
The words *friendly* and *kind* serve as positive descriptors that reinforce the favorable impression of someone.
Interpretation:
This expression conveys strong social sentiment. The speaker uses overlapping adjectives to express warmth and admiration more effectively.

g. "The problem or issue is serious."

Analysis:

The use of *problem* and *issue* both commonly found in formal settings, suggests a refined vocabulary.

Interpretation:

This pairing reflects the speaker's sensitivity to context, possibly aiming for a more formal tone while ensuring clarity for the audience.

h. "It's wrong, even incorrect."

Analysis:

The student uses *wrong* followed by *incorrect* to reinforce a critical assessment.

Interpretation:

By combining informal and formal equivalents, the speaker strengthens their argument. This shows a strategic use of vocabulary for emphasis and authority.

i. "We reached a conclusion, or decision."

Analysis:

The words *conclusion* and *decision* are semantically close and are used interchangeably in academic contexts.

Interpretation:

This phrasing indicates the speaker's intention to be precise. It may also reflect an effort to accommodate different listeners' interpretations by offering alternate but similar terms.

j. "The answer is easy, I mean simple."

Analysis:

Simple is introduced as a more relatable restatement of *easy*.

Interpretation:

This reformulation allows the speaker to adjust the message for better clarity. It shows an effort to be more accessible and to ensure that the idea is fully understood.

Table 2. Use of Antonymy in Students' Spoken Interactions

No.	Utterance	Type of Antonymy	Function of Use	Contextual Notes
a	"It's not right, it's wrong."	Direct binary antonym	Correction or affirmation	Expresses firm judgment or contradiction
b	"That was easy, not hard."	Gradable antonym	Clarification through contrast	Describes difficulty level in a comparative tone
c	"The class is fun, not boring."	Attitudinal antonymy	Expressing opinion or feeling	Subjective evaluation of experience
d	"This is a short, not long paragraph."	Spatial/length antonym pair	Descriptive explanation	Defines physical length or extent
e	"You must be serious, not joking."	Behavioral antonym	Behavioral correction or advice	Differentiates formal vs. informal behavior

2. Antonymy

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It was used in contrast, argumentation, and correction. There were 5 antonymy utterances which as follows:

a. "It's not right, it's wrong."
Analysis:
The statement uses a strict binary contrast between *right* and *wrong*, presenting two opposing concepts without any middle ground.
Interpretation:
This expression reflects a firm judgment, suggesting the student is drawing a clear line between what is acceptable and what is not. The use of antonyms here helps reinforce certainty and make the correction more direct and emphatic.
b. "That was easy, not hard."
Analysis:
This sentence demonstrates a gradable contrast, where *easy* and *hard* exist on a scale of difficulty, representing different ends of the continuum.
Interpretation:
The speaker offers a personal assessment by showing contrast in how demanding a task might be. This use of gradable opposites suggests the student is learning how to express relative judgments using more precise descriptive language.
c. "The class is fun, not boring."
Analysis:
In this example, *fun* and *boring* reflect contrasting emotional reactions, highlighting how one experience can be viewed positively or negatively.
Interpretation:
The contrast shows that the student is expressing their personal feelings toward the activity. This kind of antonym use helps to convey opinions and emotional engagement, showing that the speaker is using language to express evaluation, not just describe facts.
d. "This is a short, not long paragraph."
Analysis:
The words *short* and *long* serve as opposites in physical measurement, particularly in terms of space or length.
Interpretation:
This utterance shows the student's ability to observe and describe a text's physical property using contrasting terms. It reflects a foundational linguistic skill: identifying measurable features and communicating them clearly through antonymic choices.
e. "You must be serious, not joking."
Analysis:
This sentence sets up a contrast between behavioral modes, with *serious* and *joking* representing opposing communication styles.
Interpretation:
Here, the learner uses language to shape how the conversation is going. By contrasting these terms, the speaker is not just labeling actions but also directing social expectations, revealing an understanding of how word choices influence the tone and flow of interaction.

Table 3. Use of Hyponymy in Students' Spoken Interactions

No.	Utterance	Type of Hyponymy	Function of Use	Contextual Notes
a	"Mammals like dogs, cats, and whales are interesting."	Specific types under general class	Illustration through classification	Defines members of a biological category
b	"Pollution includes air pollution, water pollution."	Subtypes under broader theme	Clarifying scope of topic	Expands understanding of environmental issues
c	"We studied genres like horror, romance, comedy."	Hyponymy in literature	Detailing examples under a category	Used in academic/literary discussion
d	"He likes sports such as football, tennis, badminton."	Category listing	Demonstrating preferences by category	Lists subcategories of a general interest
e	"They talked about transportation: bus, train, bike."	Lexical group expansion	Enumerating examples for clarity	Defines examples of transportation modes

3. Hyponymy

It was used in category-based discussion. There were 5 hyponymy utterances as follows:

a. "Mammals like dogs, cats, and whales are interesting."
Analysis:
This sentence shows a clear example of lexical categorization, where *dogs*, *cats*, and *whales* serve as particular instances within the broader classification of *mammals*.
Interpretation:
The student structures their statement by referencing a general category followed by specific items within it. This reveals an ability to conceptualize hierarchical relationships and apply semantic grouping, offering both general understanding and tangible examples to support their thought process.
b. "Pollution includes air pollution, water pollution."
Analysis:
This construction demonstrates the breakdown of a general idea (*pollution*) into more specific forms (*air* and *water pollution*), each representing a subdivision of the main concept.
Interpretation:
Here, the student clarifies a broad environmental term by listing its particular types. This approach highlights an effort to communicate with greater specificity and suggests an understanding of how abstract concepts can be explained through concrete elaboration.

c. "We studied genres like horror, romance, comedy."
Analysis:
This utterance shows the application of hyponymy within the realm of literature, where each named genre is a particular form under the overarching category of *genre*.
Interpretation:
By identifying different literary styles, the student showcases both subject knowledge and an ability to classify within a thematic domain. This pattern helps convey meaning more systematically and mirrors how literary studies are often organized in educational settings.
d. "He likes sports such as football, tennis, badminton."
Analysis:
This example highlights a general-to-specific relationship, where *football*, *tennis*, and *badminton* are concrete representations of the wider term *sports*.
Interpretation:
Listing particular sports under a common theme aids in clarity and communication. It also reflects the student's developing ability to use representative examples to reinforce a general statement, enhancing the coherence and descriptiveness of their expression.
e. "They talked about transportation: bus, train, bike."
Analysis:
The sentence presents *transportation* as a general concept, which is then clarified through examples like *bus*, *train*, and *bike* . Each belonging to that semantic field.
Interpretation:
This illustrates how the speaker expands on a main topic by incorporating real-world instances. The utterance supports informative discourse by enriching the base concept with illustrative details, showing competence in lexical organization and topic elaboration.

Table 4. Use of Meronymy in Students' Spoken Interactions

No.	Utterance	Type of Meronymy	Function of Use	Contextual Notes
a	"The car has wheels, engine, windows."	Vehicle parts listed	Identifying components	Demonstrates part-whole relationship in transportation
b	"A computer has monitor, keyboard, CPU."	Technology parts	Describing composition	Breaks down components of a device
c	"The house has roof, walls, doors."	Structural meronymy	Clarifying physical structure	Illustrates basic construction elements
d	"A book contains pages, chapters, cover."	Object anatomy	Explaining item structure	Outlines standard parts of a book

e	"Human body has head, arms, legs."	Biological meronymy	Describing body structure	Expresses body composition using visible parts

4. Meronymy

They were part-whole relationships used descriptively. There were 5 meronymy utterances which as follows:

a. "The car has wheels, engine, windows."

Analysis:

This sentence outlines various essential components that make up a vehicle, focusing on its physical and mechanical attributes.

Interpretation:

The learner shows awareness that certain objects are composed of several distinct, functional units. This approach enhances descriptive effectiveness and indicates an emerging grasp of how meaning is constructed through part-whole relations, especially in contexts related to tools or machines.

b. "A computer has monitor, keyboard, CPU."

Analysis:

The phrase demonstrates the internal structure of a computer, naming specific devices that together form a technological system.

Interpretation:

The student provides a breakdown of the term *computer* into identifiable, interactive elements. This reflects not only vocabulary acquisition within digital contexts but also the learner's ability to conceptualize complex items by referring to their constituent parts for clearer communication.

c. "The house has roof, walls, doors."

Analysis:

This utterance presents architectural components of a building, each contributing to the functionality and completeness of the structure.

Interpretation:

The speaker applies part–whole associations to describe physical structures in space. Such linguistic behavior points to an understanding of how objects are organized visually and functionally, reflecting the learner's ability to relate vocabulary to observable, real-world entities.

d. "A book contains pages, chapters, cover."

Analysis:

The example illustrates the internal composition of a book by listing features that are essential to its form and use.

Interpretation:

Here, the speaker engages in semantic dissection, using specific vocabulary to elaborate on the contents of a printed work. This reveals a strategy for clarifying meaning through structural detail, showing how learners build mental representations of complex items in educational settings.

e. "Human body has head, arms, legs."
Analysis:
This construction refers to physical anatomy, identifying body parts that are inherently connected to the human form.
Interpretation:
The learner displays an understanding of how living organisms are structured by naming major body segments. This use of meronymy supports scientific description and indicates that vocabulary is grounded in personal experience, making it easier to remember and use in everyday or academic contexts.

Table 5. Use of Collocation in Students' Spoken Interactions

No.	Sentence	Collocation Identified	Type of Collocation	Analysis / Meaning Construction
a	Make a decision quickly.	make a decision	verb + noun	Preferred over 'do a decision'; conveys decisiveness
b	I have to do homework now.	do homework	verb + noun	'Do' is conventionally used with 'homework'
c	She took a break after lunch.	take a break	verb + noun	Natural collocation for resting
d	They give a presentation on Monday.	give a presentation	verb + noun	Common in academic/business contexts
e	He made a mistake during the speech.	make a mistake	verb + noun	'Make' is standard; 'do a mistake' is incorrect
f	Can you take a photo of us?	take a photo	verb + noun	Conventional usage in photography
g	Please pay attention in class.	pay attention	verb + noun	Used to instruct focus or concentration
h	I want to learn English more.	learn English	verb + noun	Strong and standard for language acquisition
i	We had a discussion yesterday.	have a discussion	verb + noun	More natural than 'do a discussion'
j	They took responsibility for the error.	take responsibility	verb + noun	Formal/apologetic tone; reflects accountability

5. Collocation
They were common pairings frequently used in conversation. There were 10 collocation utterances as follows:

a. "Make a decision quickly."
Collocation: *make a decision*
Category: Verb + Noun

Analysis:

The verb *make* is the standard lexical partner of *decision* in English, used to express the process of selecting an option. Alternatives like *do a decision* are not considered natural or acceptable in standard English usage.

Interpretation:

Using this expression suggests the speaker intends to convey promptness and resolve. It indicates that the learner is beginning to adopt conventional language patterns that enhance fluency and align with natural language use.

b. "I have to do homework now."

Collocation: *do homework*

Category: Verb + Noun

Analysis:

The verb *do* typically combines with terms referring to tasks such as *homework*, *chores*, or *housework*, forming a fixed expression common in daily English.

Interpretation:

This phrase shows that the speaker understands how fixed language combinations function in everyday communication. It reflects an expanding vocabulary repertoire, especially relevant to academic and routine activities.

c. "She took a break after lunch."

Collocation: *take a break*

Category: Verb + Noun

Analysis:

Take a break is a well-established collocation used when referring to short periods of rest, suitable for both informal and professional scenarios.

Interpretation:

This construction displays the speaker's ability to use standard expressions for everyday actions. It points to familiarity with ready-made phrases that promote fluency and reduce processing time during conversation.

d. "They give a presentation on Monday."

Collocation: *give a presentation*

Category: Verb + Noun

Analysis:

This phrase is commonly found in formal settings, like schools or workplaces, and replaces literal translations such as *do a presentation*, which are less idiomatic in English.

Interpretation:

The choice of this expression reflects an awareness of formal discourse norms, especially within academic or professional settings. It indicates growing proficiency in domain-specific communication.

e. "He made a mistake during the speech."

Collocation: *make a mistake*

Category: Verb + Noun

Analysis:

In English, *make* is the appropriate verb for *mistake*, as opposed to *do*, which results in an ungrammatical phrase.

Interpretation:

This usage reflects a grasp of how common errors are described in English. It

also suggests the learner can communicate effectively about challenges or errors in a socially accepted way.

f. "Can you take a photo of us?"

Collocation: *take a photo*

Category: Verb + Noun

Analysis:

Take is routinely used in relation to photography, forming a natural and widely understood phrase.

Interpretation:

This expression reveals that the learner can navigate everyday scenarios with conventional language. It shows fluency in expressions linked to social and technological contexts.

g. "Please pay attention in class."

Collocation: *pay attention*

Category: Verb + Noun

Analysis:

This is a standard phrase used by teachers or authority figures to direct someone's focus or concentration.

Interpretation:

Employing this collocation demonstrates an understanding of directive language. It also suggests the learner is developing competence in instructional or authoritative communication.

h. "I want to learn English more."

Collocation: *learn English*

Category: Verb + Noun

Analysis:

The verb *learn* is the typical choice when discussing the process of gaining knowledge, especially languages.

Interpretation:

This construction shows that the speaker can express educational goals effectively. It points to a developing ability to articulate personal learning intentions in a precise and conventional way.

i. "We had a discussion yesterday."

Collocation: *have a discussion*

Category: Verb + Noun

Analysis:

Have is the standard collocating verb used with *discussion*, particularly in structured or reflective conversations.

Interpretation:

This phrase indicates comfort with formal expressions and suggests a more advanced level of discourse control. It supports logical and organized communication in academic or group settings.

j. "They took responsibility for the error."

Collocation: *take responsibility*

Category: Verb + Noun

Analysis:

This is a fixed phrase frequently used to indicate accountability, particularly in professional or serious situations.

Interpretation:
Using this collocation implies familiarity with expressions related to ethical behavior and leadership. It reflects a refined sense of appropriateness in formal and corrective language contexts.

Conclusion

The analysis of 35 student utterances in spoken discourse highlights a progressive development in their use of lexical semantic relations, demonstrating their growing linguistic competence. Among these, synonymy emerged as the most prevalent, used not only to reiterate ideas but also to enhance clarity and precision through emotionally and contextually nuanced alternatives. Antonymy served as a strategic device for establishing contrast and asserting evaluations, with students employing binary, gradable, and behavioral opposites to articulate personal stances or corrections. The use of hyponymy revealed an ability to organize vocabulary hierarchically, especially when explaining broad concepts through specific examples in academic topics like genres, animals, and modes of transportation. Similarly, meronymy appeared in object-focused descriptions, where learners effectively referenced component parts to elaborate on structures such as computers, vehicles, and the human body indicating an ability to handle descriptive language with increased accuracy. Collocational use was notably natural and correct, suggesting that students are moving beyond isolated vocabulary items and toward fluency through the use of conventional verb-noun pairings in both informal and academic contexts. Overall, the findings suggest that students are developing awareness of how lexical relations function in spoken interaction, which supports not only effective communication but also higher-order skills like emphasis, elaboration, and categorization. To support this development, educators are advised to integrate targeted vocabulary instruction centered on semantic networks such as synonym webs, antonymic contrasts, hierarchical categories, and collocational patterns. Furthermore, communicative activities like debates and peer explanation tasks should be designed to encourage real-time lexical exploration. For future exploration, research could examine the role of these semantic strategies across diverse genres and proficiency levels, while AI (Artificial Intelligence) tools might be used to enhance learners' awareness of lexical options during oral or written production.

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