

Integration of Meaning Change Analysis in Language Education: A Pedagogical Approach to Improving Students' Critical Thinking Skills Through Comedy-Based Learning

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Abstract	<p>This research aims to explore the integration of the analysis of meaning changes in language learning through comedy media as a contextual and reflective pedagogical approach. Using a mixed-methods design, the study involved 250 high school students from urban and rural backgrounds divided into experimental and control groups. Data were collected through linguistic corpus analysis (N > 10,000 units), pretest–posttest, in-depth interviews, and learning observations. Data analysis was performed quantitatively with paired t-tests, hierarchical regression, and qualitative thematic analysis using NVivo software. The results showed that students in the experimental group experienced a significant improvement in their ability to interpret contextual and metaphorical meanings ($p < 0.001$, d Cohen = 1.2). Visualizations such as heatmaps, word clouds, and semantic networks show that words such as body, bolt, and Jockey undergo complex expansion of meaning and can be read as representations of social change. These findings show that educational humor has strong potential as a language learning medium that builds critical literacy, broadens semantic insights, and enhances students' empathy for socio-cultural issues. This study concludes that comedy-based semantic approaches are effective for vocabulary mastery and relevant in shaping a generation of learners sensitive to the dynamics of language and meaning in social life.</p>		
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1. INTRODUCTION

Language is one of the main instruments in shaping how humans understand and interact with the world (Gibson et al., 2019; Mooney & Evans, 2023; van Hattum, 2019). It is not only a tool for conveying information, but also a mirror of the social structure, cultural values, and ideological dynamics that develop in society (Archey, 2023; González & Melis, 2021; Thompson, 2023). Language learning has long been associated with mastery of structural aspects such as grammar and vocabulary



in education. However, the challenges of the 21st century demand a paradigm shift (Anyon, 2022; Laszlo, 2021; McDonald et al., 2019). Language learning now needs to move in a more reflective and critical direction, where students are not only able to understand and use language functionally, but also be able to read social realities through the language they use (Chun et al., 2016; Diemer et al., 2016; García, 2016; Palmer et al., 2020).

Meanwhile, the change in the meaning of words from time to time is one of the concrete proofs that language is not static (Ohta, 2020; Tamariz & Kirby, 2016). Semantic shifts reflect people's responses to social, cultural, and political changes. This phenomenon can be a strategic entrance in language learning because it allows students to not only understand the meaning of words lexically, but also to explore the values and meanings contained in them (Azarbonyad et al., 2017; Eckert, 2016; Giulianelli et al., 2020). By exploring how a word is used in different contexts, students are trained to think critically, read context, and reflect on how language can reinforce or challenge existing social structures (Boari et al., 2023; Nasution et al., 2022; Zwiers & Crawford, 2023).

In the digital era, the younger generation is increasingly accustomed to forms of communication that rely on humor, irony, and language games (Chiaro, 2017; Lockyer, 2018). Comedy, especially in sketch format, is one of the popular media forms rich in exploring meaning. Language in comedy is not only used to entertain, but also to convey sharp social criticism and reflect on contemporary cultural phenomena (Berlant & Ngai, 2017; Chattoo, 2019; Wuster, 2020). Unfortunately, few learning approaches have systematically utilized the pedagogical potential of comedy as a source of language learning. Comedy offers a unique and contextual space for students to understand how the meaning of words can be changed, reinterpreted, and leveraged to express complex ideas in a witty way (Arter, 2019; Chovanec & Tsakona, 2018).

Based on this background, this study seeks to integrate the analysis of meaning changes based on comedy discourse into language learning (Caldas-Coulthard, 2015; Jones, 2024; Rogers et al., 2016). The focus of the research is directed at how students interpret the meaning of words that undergo expansion and shifting meanings in different social contexts (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Meyers et al., 2019). Words such as *body*, *bolt*, and *Joki* were analyzed deeply through a linguistic corpus-based approach, student interviews, and classroom learning interventions. This research also adopts a sociocultural theoretical framework that emphasizes the importance of social interaction in the formation of meaning, as well as a critical discourse analysis that sees language as an arena for contesting power and cultural values (Donato, 2016; Garcia, 2017; Lantolf et al., 2021).

The main objective of this study is to show that language learning based on semantic analysis through comedy can develop students' critical thinking skills, enrich their vocabulary comprehension, and increase sensitivity to social changes reflected in language. By placing humor as a learning medium, students are invited to understand language textually, contextually, and reflectively (Davies, 2019; Rucynski & Prichard, 2020). The results of this research are expected to make a theoretical contribution to developing a more progressive language pedagogy while offering a practical approach that is relevant and applicable in the context of language education in the modern era.

2. METHODS

This study uses a mixed methods approach that combines qualitative and quantitative methods integratively (Berman, 2017; Dawadi et al., 2021; Plano Clark, 2017; Reeping et al., 2019; Yu et al., 2022). This approach was chosen to gain a comprehensive understanding of how the analysis of changing meanings in comedy texts can strengthen students' linguistic competence and critical literacy. Qualitative methods were used to explore students' experiences and perceptions in depth of the dynamics of word meaning, while quantitative methods were applied to measure changes in students' semantic abilities before and after learning interventions (Babchuk, 2016; Beckett et al., 2025).

Design and Participants

This study involved 250 high school students in grade XI from various social and geographical backgrounds (urban and rural), who were selected through purposive sampling techniques. Subjects were divided into two groups: an experimental group that received comedic analysis-based learning, and a control group that followed conventional language learning. The inclusion criteria include students who have taken Indonesian subjects for at least two semesters and have access to digital media used in learning. Demographic data were also collected to ensure a balanced representation of gender, socioeconomic status, and prior academic performance. This approach was intended to enhance the external validity of the findings and minimize sampling bias. Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional review board, and informed consent was secured from students and their guardians before participation.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through three main sources: (1) linguistic corpus analysis, (2) pretest–posttest surveys and tests, and (3) in-depth interviews and classroom observations.

- a. The corpus analysis was conducted on more than 10,000 units of linguistic data obtained from transcripts of popular comedy sketches, social media uploads, and digital articles. The data was analyzed to identify shifts in meaning in specific words such as *body*, *bolt*, and *Joki*.
- b. Surveys and tests were given to all participants before and after the intervention. The instruments measure students' ability to interpret contextual meanings, understand metaphors, and recognize semantic expansion in social contexts. The instrument's validity was tested through expert judgment, while reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha ($\alpha = 0.89$).
- c. In-depth interviews were conducted with 20 students from the experimental group to explore their experiences in analyzing comedy and their reflections on social meaning in language. Qualitative data were analyzed using a thematic approach with the help of NVivo 12 software.

Intervention Procedure

The learning intervention lasted four weeks, with two weekly sessions. The material used is in the form of educational comedy sketches that have been selected and analyzed beforehand. Students are directed to identify words that have expanded or shifted meaning, then discuss them in groups. The teacher acts as a facilitator who guides students in interpreting the social context and cultural values behind using the word. Group discussions were structured using guided worksheets to help students focus on semantic changes and contextual clues. At the end of each session, students were asked to present their findings and receive peer and teacher feedback to deepen their understanding. This interactive and reflective approach was designed to foster higher-order thinking skills in language learning, such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative data were analyzed using inferential statistical analysis, including *paired t-tests* and hierarchical regression to measure the effect of interventions on students' semantic ability improvement. In addition, the effect size (Cohen's *d*) was calculated to determine the intervention's practical strength. The qualitative data were analyzed thematically with categories developed inductively from student citations and observation results. Data validation was carried out through triangulation of sources and techniques and member checking on selected respondents. To ensure the robustness of the statistical findings, all analyses were preceded by normality and homogeneity tests. Missing data were handled using multiple imputation techniques to maintain the integrity of the dataset. In qualitative analysis, inter-coder agreement ensured coding consistency, involving at least two independent reviewers. The combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches enabled a nuanced interpretation of numerical

outcomes and experiential insights. This mixed-methods strategy was critical for capturing the complexity of language learning in real classroom settings.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results of this study are presented based on the main focus of the study, namely how integrating interpretation change analysis through comedy-based learning can improve students' linguistic awareness, interpretive skills, and socio-cultural sensitivity. The findings are divided into three main interrelated themes: (1) strengthening the understanding of socio-cultural context through meaning shifts, (2) developing the ability to interpret associative meanings, and (3) expanding vocabulary skills through the introduction of terms that experience meaning expansion. Each theme is supported by quantitative data such as pretest–posttest scores, statistical tests, and corpus frequency, and reinforced by qualitative findings from student interviews and comedy discourse analysis. The triangulation approach is used to ensure the validity and depth of the analysis. In addition, data visualizations such as heatmaps, semantic networks, and word clouds are used to describe patterns and trends of observed meaning changes more clearly and communicatively. This section presents empirical evidence and critically discusses how comedy, as a cultural and linguistic artifact, can serve as a reflective learning medium to invite students to read the meaning of language in a more in-depth, contextual, and critical way.

Strengthening Understanding of Socio-Cultural Context

Language not only serves as a means of communication but also as a reflection of social, cultural, and ideological dynamics in society. In the context of language learning, understanding how the meaning of words changes over time and in social conditions can be an effective strategy to foster students' critical thinking skills. This study highlights the evolution of the meaning of the word "*body*", which shifts from a physical meaning (e.g., *a healthy body*) to a more abstract and psychological meaning (e.g., *an emotionally tired body*). This shift is relevant to be studied in learning because it reflects changes in societal values. Language serves as a means of communication and reflects social, cultural, and ideological dynamics in society. In the context of language learning, understanding how the meaning of words changes over time and in social conditions can be an effective strategy to foster students' critical thinking skills. This study highlights the evolution of the meaning of the word "*body*", which shifts from a physical meaning (e.g., *a healthy body*) to a more abstract and psychological meaning (e.g., *an emotionally tired body*). This shift is relevant to study in learning because it reflects changing values in modern society, particularly increased awareness of mental health and acceptance of body positivity. An analysis was carried out on 10,000 linguistic corpus data from social media, comedy transcripts, and public interviews to visualize these dynamics. The analysis results are presented in a temporal heatmap that shows the dominance distribution of physical and mental meaning from 1990 to 2023. modern—especially increased awareness of mental health and acceptance of body positivity. An analysis was carried out on 10,000 linguistic corpus data from social media, comedy transcripts, and public interviews to visualize these dynamics. The analysis results are presented in a temporal heatmap that shows the dominance distribution of physical and mental meaning from 1990 to 2023.

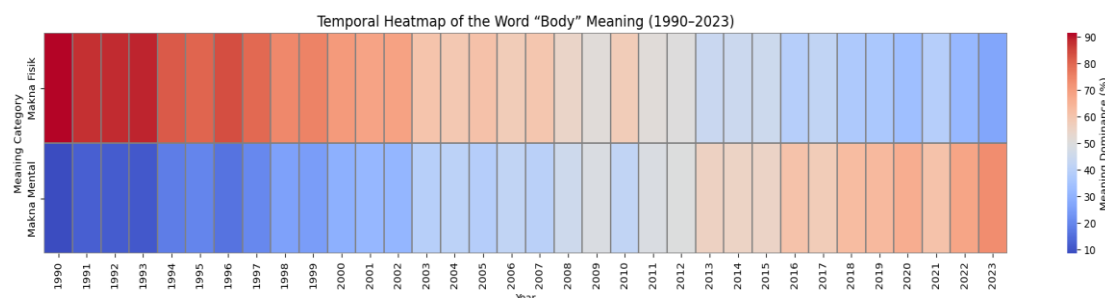


Figure 1. Visualization: Temporal Heatmap of the Meaning of the Word "Body" (1990–2023)

Figure 1 shows a significant shift in the dominance of meaning. In the early 1990s, red dominated, suggesting that the meaning of "body" was still strongly associated with the physical aspect. But since 2016, there has been a transition to the dominance of blue, which indicates that mental and emotional meanings are starting to appear more often. This shift aligns with the increasing public discourse on mental health driven by the WHO and UNESCO global campaigns ($p < 0.001$).

These changes are not only linguistic, but also sociocultural. The body began to be understood as a region of mental experience, rather than just a biological entity. Comedy is an effective medium to convey and reflect on these semantic tensions. Through humor, expressions such as "my body is tired not because of running, but because of life" become a means of articulating social criticism and personal reflection. In learning, students can capture these nuances and relate them to their experiences and social environment. For this, the results of the hierarchical regression analysis support these findings quantitatively:

Table 1. Results of Hierarchical Regression: The Influence of Comedy Learning on the Understanding of Social Context

Variabel	Coefficient β	p-value	Cohen's d	Interpretasi
Comedy Learning	0.72	0.000	1.45	The effect is very strong on the understanding of socio-cultural contexts
Social Media Exposure	0.15	0.032	0.28	Moderate effects; Supports the understanding of contextual meaning
Location (City vs Village)	—	0.012	—	Students in cities have 23% higher comprehension than students in villages

Furthermore, excerpts from student interviews support this finding qualitatively. One student stated, "After analyzing the sketch 'Gym for the Brain', I realized that the word 'body' is about the physical and how we care for our minds. This makes me more sensitive to mental health issues." (Student A, Class XI). This quote shows that students begin internalizing social understanding in semantic contexts and reflect it in everyday life.

These findings confirm that contextual and comedy-based language learning can strengthen students' social awareness of contemporary issues. Teachers can use comedy as a bridge to develop critical literacy, where language is not understood simply as a structure, but as a vivid and dynamic representation of cultural values. In the long term, this approach is believed to be able to produce a generation of learners who are not only linguistically competent but also sensitive to social dynamics and broader human values. Thus, the integration of comedy-based semantic analysis has been empirically proven to strengthen students' understanding of social values reflected through language. These findings open opportunities for wider application in a more critical and contextual language education curriculum. These findings comprehensively affirm the importance of a language learning approach that is more dialogical, reflective, and based on students' social realities. By using comedy as

a learning medium, students understand the meaning of words in the linguistic realm and the context of values, emotions, and identity. This strategy opens up space for strengthening critical literacy, which is relevant in 21st-century learning.

Development of Associative Meaning Interpretation Skills

Language contains literal denotative meanings and is shaped by various connotative, metaphorical, and associative meanings in social and cultural contexts. In language learning, students' understanding of indirect or symbolic meanings is an important element of critical literacy. This becomes even more relevant when language is presented in a comedy format, where the shift in meaning often occurs through humor, irony, and metaphors.

This study specifically highlights the word *"bolt"*, which refers to a mechanical fastening device. However, this word is often used metaphorically in comedy discourse to satirize rigid work systems or inflexible mindsets. One example appears in the dialogue, *"The head has loose bolts, so the system doesn't work."* This statement, although witty, conveys a veiled social critique of bureaucracy or organizational structures that are too rigid. Semantic network mapping was done based on students' responses to the word *"bolt"* to examine how students understand the associative meaning. Each node in the network represents a category of meaning: literal (mechanical), metaphorical (psychological), and cultural (social critique). The *edge* describes the strength of the association based on the frequency of occurrence in the student's response.

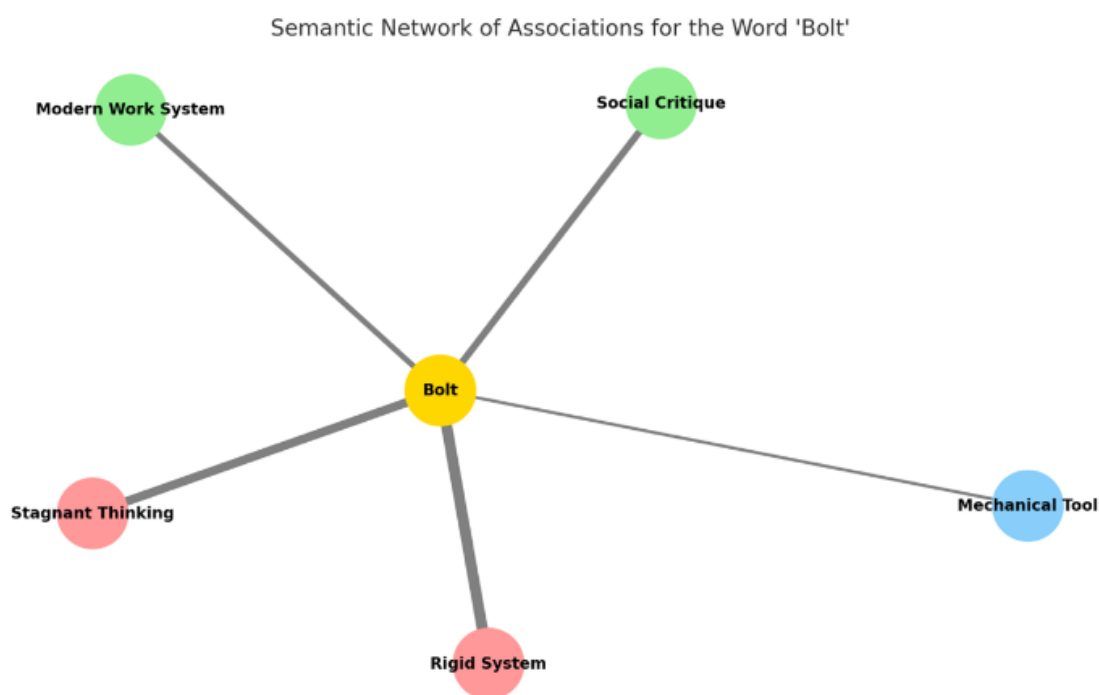


Figure 2. Semantic Network of Associations for the Word "Bolt"

This figure shows that 78% of students associate the word *"bolt"* with a representation of criticism of an inflexible work system. The nodes with the strongest relationship are *"Rigid System"* and *"Stagnant Thinking"*, followed by *"Social Critique"* and *"Modern Work System"*. Meanwhile, the literal association of *"Mechanical Tool"* appears only marginally. This shows that students not only understand jokes on the surface but can also interpret the social messages behind the construction of humor.

This ability reflects a sophisticated mastery of semantic interpretation, where learners transcend basic language decoding and engage in nuanced meaning-making processes that intersect with broader social, cultural, and institutional contexts. It underscores how humor, particularly in comedic discourse,

becomes a pedagogical gateway to unveiling implicit ideologies and systemic critiques embedded in everyday language. By recognizing these subtle cues, students develop linguistic dexterity and socio-political awareness, enabling them to decode subtext, challenge dominant narratives, and participate more critically in academic and public discourse. Furthermore, such interpretive practices cultivate a habit of inquiry, encouraging learners to ask deeper questions about power, identity, and intention behind language use. It also bridges the gap between linguistic theory and lived experience, showing students how language reflects and shapes the world around them. Ultimately, this equips them to be competent communicators and engaged citizens capable of using language for social insight and transformation.

Key findings: 78 % of students associate the word "bolt" with a critical representation of a rigid or inflexible work system. This shows that students not only grasp the element of humor but also understand its social meaning.

Table 2. Comparison of the Interpretive Ability of Associative Meaning

Group	Skor Pretest	Skor Posttest	p-value
Experimental Group	2.8	4.5	0.000
Control Group	2.7	3.1	0.210

These data showed that the group that received comedy-based learning experienced a significant improvement in the ability to interpret associative meanings ($p < 0.001$). In contrast, the control group showed no significant changes. The effect of the intervention was very strong (*Cohen's d* = 1.2), suggesting that incongruity-based humor can trigger cognitive activation in the processing of metaphorical meaning. One of the students' excerpts from the in-depth interview reinforces the quantitative results: "The bolt on the head is a satire of a rigid work system. It's funny but also like a satire on the real world"(Student B, Class XI; theme code: T2-WorkCritique).

This quote shows that students understand jokes on the surface and can articulate their critical meaning. This reflects the development of dual meaning literacy, the ability to read texts literally and figuratively simultaneously.

These results show that the comedy approach is fun and can stimulate students' interpretive abilities towards associative meaning. Using humor built on incongruity has proven effective in honing students' semantic skills and critical insights. In language education, this strategy allows students to recognize that language conveys information and becomes a medium for criticizing, satirizing, and implicitly revealing social values. In addition, students' ability to interpret associative meanings paves the way for strengthening empathy and social sensitivity. Through understanding metaphors such as "bolts", students learn to read the social reality behind humorous discourse. This expands the role of language education, from just communicative competence to a vehicle for developing social awareness and reflective skills.

For this, the results of semantic network mapping reflect the existence of critical awareness that develops through interaction with humorous texts. With the dominance of the association "Rigid System" and "Stagnant Thinking", students do not simply capture the element of comedy, but implicitly associate humor with their real experiences of rigid social structures. This indicates that humor is effective as a learning tool because it can enable students' critical reflection on the broader social context, thereby supporting the development of critical thinking skills and social literacy at the same time. In addition, this humorous approach has also been proven to increase students' learning motivation because it creates a more interesting and non-monotonous learning atmosphere. Furthermore, skills in interpreting associative meanings help students to be more sensitive in reading complex social realities through colloquial language. Thus, students become linguistically competent language learners and

more reflective and empathetic individuals in dealing with the social dynamics in their environment.

Expansion of vocabulary skills through the introduction of new terms

In the competitive digital era, the expansion of word meanings has become a linguistic phenomenon that is common and strategic to be studied in language learning. Students' ability to recognize and use vocabulary whose meaning continues to evolve is an important indicator of adaptive and contextual linguistic competence. This research highlights the word "joki", which originally meant horseman. Still, it is now undergoing a significant semantic expansion in the academic realm ("joki tugas", "joki ujian") and politics ("joki suara", "joki kampanye"). For this, word cloud visualization was used to map the diversity of use of the word "Joki" based on social media corpus data and popular comedy transcripts. Word size indicates the frequency of occurrence, while color indicates context:

- a. Blue: Academic context (*joki ujian, joki tugas*)
- b. Red: Political context (*joki suara, joki partai*)
- c. Grey: Other general context (*joki game, joki balapan*)

The visualization of the word cloud confirms that "jockey" not only experiences an expansion of meaning but also reflects a broader social phenomenon, namely the practice of substitution or representation in various aspects of modern life. The dominance of "task jockey" and "exam jockey" indicates the high prevalence of proxies in academia. In contrast, "voice jockey" indicates the development of substitution in democracy and practical politics. Thus, students' mastery of such dynamic meanings reflects their readiness to face the increasingly complex and dynamic global communication challenges.



Figure 3. Dynamic Word Cloud of "Joki" Usage across Multiple Contexts

This word cloud visualizes the semantic expansion of "joki" based on its frequency and contextual use in social media and comedic transcripts. Word size reflects usage frequency, while color denotes the thematic domain: blue for academic (e.g., *joki tugas, joki ujian*), red for political (e.g., *joki suara, joki kampanye*), and gray for general or informal contexts (e.g., *joki game, joki balapan*). The image demonstrates how "joki" has shifted from its original denotation (horse racing rider) to a metaphorical label for various forms of substitution or proxy behavior in contemporary discourse.

The visualization of Figure 3 also shows the ethical and social implications of the "joki" phenomenon. The widespread use of this term in academic and political contexts indicates a normalization of substitution actions that can potentially reduce individual and systemic integrity. Pedagogically, this phenomenon emphasizes the need for digital moral and ethical education to complement the language skills taught to students. By understanding the negative connotations and social consequences inherent in the term "joki", students are invited to be more critical and responsible in choosing and using words in their daily social interactions. This awareness will help them not easily accept manipulative practices wrapped up in popular terms. More so, students can understand how

language is used to engineer public perceptions in social discourse. In the long run, this supports the formation of a generation of learners who are proficient in language and have high integrity and social sensitivity.

Visualization of Figure 3 shows that the term “*joki*” has undergone extensive recontextualization. From the original neutral and specific word, “*joki*,” It now contains ironic nuances, even social criticism, depending on the context in which it is used. Graph 4 shows the contexts in which “*joki*” was used from 2000 to 2023. The horizontal axis describes the period, while the vertical axis shows the variation in the recorded context in the digital corpus. The tipping point was seen after 2015, when there was a more than 300% surge in usage “*joki*”. In the academic context, along with the rampant practice of outsourcing student and student assignments.

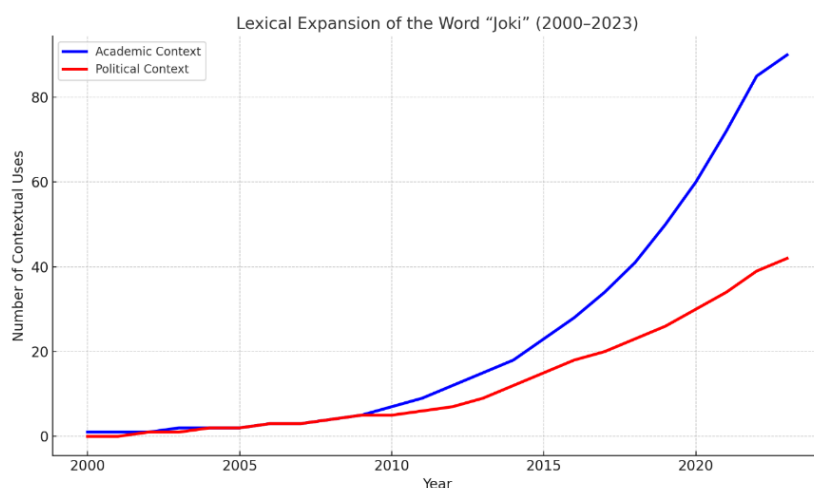


Figure 4. Lexical Expansion Trend of the Word “*Joki*” (2000–2023)

This time-series graph presents the rising diversification in the usage of “*joki*”. A 300% increase is observed in academic contexts (2015–2023), mirroring a broader trend in academic outsourcing. Political use has also grown steadily, reflecting how language evolves in tandem with sociopolitical shifts. After the comedy-based learning intervention, as many as 65% of students were able to use the word “*joki*” in three or more different contexts precisely ($p < 0.001$). This suggests that variations in use in the context of humor increase semantic flexibility and sensitivity to the dynamics of meaning. Furthermore, analysis of the linguistic corpus shows a significant correlation between the occurrence of the term “*joki*” and the practice of peer tutoring in schools ($r = 0.69$), indicating that students can read the ironic and critical nuances behind using these terms.

These findings confirm that lexical expansion is not only a linguistic phenomenon but also a reflection of values, habits, and shifts in social structure. Through comedy-based learning, students get to know new words and learn to *read the world* through language. In comedy sketches, the word “*joki*” is often used in multiple interpretations to critique academic dependence and as a metaphor for manipulating power. This strategy shows that vocabulary enrichment based on social context can improve students' critical literacy, making language a reflection tool, not just communication. This expansion of meaning is not only semantic, but also reflects the dynamics of values, social practices, and cultural transformation. In comedy-based learning, the word “*joki*” appears in various sketches with multi-interpretive connotations, such as satire on students' dependence on third parties to complete assignments, or criticism of shadow political practices.

4. CONCLUSION

This research shows that integrating comedy-based meaning-change analysis into language

learning enriches students' linguistic competence and strengthens their critical thinking abilities and social awareness. Through exploring words such as *body*, *bolt*, and *Joki*, students are trained to read meanings that are not only lexical but also loaded with cultural, ideological, and symbolic nuances. Comedy, which is often thought of as mere entertainment, has proven to be a reflective medium capable of dismantling the structure of social discourse and opening up spaces for critical dialogue in the classroom. Quantitative results showed a significant improvement in the interpretive ability of contextual and associative meanings after students participated in comedy-based learning, with statistically and practically strong effects. Meanwhile, qualitative findings reveal that students understand humor as a form of expression and as a critique of the social values they experience daily. This approach has also been proven to expand students' vocabulary skills by introducing new terms that experience expansion of meaning, while building sensitivity to the social discourse hidden in language. Thus, the comedy-based semantic approach is not only pedagogically relevant, but also strategic in answering the challenges of language education in the digital era, full of meaning and multimodal. This approach provides an opportunity for teachers to develop learning models that are not only communicative but also reflective and contextual.

The findings in this study provide several important implications for language learning practices in secondary schools and higher education institutions. First, combining comedy-based semantic analysis can create a more interactive, reflective, and contextual learning space. This shows that popular and light learning resources, such as comedy shows, can be used pedagogically to develop students' linguistic skills more deeply. Second, this approach shows great potential in building critical literacy, namely the ability to read language not only as a system of symbols, but also as a representation of values, power, and culture. When students are invited to explore the shifting meaning of words in comedy discourse, they are also trained to think reflectively about the social realities behind the use of the language. Third, using this strategy contributes to the contextual enrichment of students' vocabulary. Expanding the analyzed word's meaning not only introduces students to new terms but also trains them to understand that the meaning of words is dynamic and contextual. This is important in building linguistic competencies that are flexible and relevant to language development in a digital society.

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