

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter contains an explanation of the background that is the main basis for conducting this research, problem statements, research objectives, significance, and definitions of important terms.

1.1 Background of The Research

Nowadays, games are no longer seen as just a means of entertainment, but have gone so far as to become part of an individual's lifestyle. Even today, due to its rapid development, the gaming industry has become one of the most promising industries. According to Bihari & Pattanaik (2024), the gaming industry, also known as esports, is a multi-billion-dollar industry that is projected to reach an audience of 640 million people by 2025. Therefore, it can be said that nowadays, games have become a necessity for most people, especially online games. According to statistics obtained from the [academyofanimatedart.com](https://www.academyofanimatedart.com) website, more than 40% of the world's population is gamers (Katatikarn, 2024).

Furthermore, online games allow players to communicate with each other in real time, which is one of the features that make online games so popular. For example, players can communicate even if they are in different countries. Furthermore, the community of online game players is one of the largest and heterogeneous communities, and it is something that strengthens the appeal of online games. This community was formed due to regular communication in cyberspace (Arifah & Candrasari, 2022). This aspect is an advantage in online games when compared to other types of games.

One of the most popular online game genres in the world is MOBA, which stands for Multiplayer Online Battle Arena. The most prominent characteristic of this genre is the combination of strategy elements with teamwork. In this case, the team in question refers to the 2 main camps that fight each other to destroy their opponent's base. One example of a game that is in the top tier of this MOBA genre is Dota 2, which was first released in 2013 and became a lot of motivation in the development and creation of games in this genre. Currently, the number of monthly active players of this game exceeds 7.6 million. Currently, the number of players active online at the same time is around 300,000, but in its heyday in 2016, Dota 2 had an all-time peak of 1295114 players according to SteamDB (2025).

It can be said that communication in games, with the MOBA genre such as Dota 2, is crucial; it will be difficult to work together in your team if communication between players does not go well. Likewise, there are also strategies to communicate with enemies that aim to reduce the opponent's motivation, such as by mocking. Therefore, interaction in the form of communication in Dota 2 very often occurs. In addition, because this game has been around for a long time and the players come from various cultural backgrounds and diverse languages, some new slang words appear in the language used in playing this game. Especially on the SEA (Southeast Asia) server, where the players are not from English-speaking countries, the slang word that emerges becomes very varied.

According to Sinaga et al. (2020), Slang is considered a very informal word or expression that is commonly used in our everyday conversation. Slang can be in the form of creating a new term in a certain context or changing the meaning of an

existing word or term. The emergence of slang from changes in the meaning of existing terms is often studied in linguistics, precisely in the semantic field. Understanding how slang evolves cannot be separated from a broader linguistic process known as semantic change.

Semantic change is a linguistic phenomenon that occurs naturally in language development, especially in communities that actively communicate, such as online game players. In the context of Dota 2 on the SEA server, this meaning change is interesting to study because many terms experience shifts in meaning due to cross-cultural interactions and use in dynamic game situations. Understanding semantic change in the slang used by Dota 2 players can provide insight into how language evolves within a particular community and how a word or phrase experiences narrowing, broadening, or shifting. As such, this research can contribute to the study of linguistics, particularly in understanding patterns of meaning change in the context of digital and evolving gaming culture.

The semantic changes that occur in Dota 2 slang demonstrate how language naturally changes in the gaming world and show how quickly slang is formed and used. Players talk to each other in online games that are constantly adding to or changing the language and terms used in the game. Since Dota 2 has so many players involved and is a MOBA game, this change in language is obvious. The meaning of a term can change or be used differently, based on the social situation in which it appears.

In this situation, slang is more than just unhurried language. Husa (2017) believes that slang is formed when grammar or vocabulary is changed to preserve

its meaning, usually so that people can keep secrets or add humor. Sometimes, in Dota 2, players create simple new expressions by distorting concepts from the game or using game terms in new ways. This gives players a way to bond and also helps the community form a unique identity because of Dota 2. It is also clear that Dota 2 slang influences outside of the game. Slang expressions shared between players often make their way into other games and are sometimes used by people daily.

Usually, these semantic changes start with imaginative uses of existing words, after which the meaning of those words begins to differ based on their setting. Usually, the process occurs naturally when people with different backgrounds talk and act with each other. For this reason, it is important to study Dota 2 chat language closely, especially in terms of slang words, to see how ordinary vocabulary changes its meanings in-game.

As explained earlier, slang that emerges is sometimes created from existing terms that are familiar to everyday vocabulary. In practice, the term is used to convey a meaning that deviates from the original meaning of the term. The occurrence of these changes in meaning goes through various processes that often do not take place formally. The interaction of various individuals with various backgrounds in a community often initiates the process. In addition, if we look at the views of Fromkin et al. (2010) in their book *An Introduction to Language* we see that changes in the meaning of a word or term can occur over time. In the book, they classify semantic change into 3 categories, namely, its meaning can be narrower, its meaning can be broader, and its meaning can be shifted.

Analysis of semantic change can provide an understanding of the origin of other words. The use of Fromkin et al.'s theory in this study is based on its relevance in determining the original meaning of a word in the context of semantic change. On the other hand, this research aims to explore the phenomenon of the birth of new slang and how this slang is used in the communication of its users. This research is important because changes in the meaning of slang words influence communication within the game and affect interactions beyond the gaming context. Slang originating from the Dota 2 community can appear in everyday conversations, on social media, and within other online communities. If the meaning of such slang is not accurately understood, especially due to semantic shifts, it can lead to misunderstandings in cross-community or cross-cultural communication. Therefore, this study is expected to contribute to a better understanding of the dynamics of semantic change in slang and its impact on broader communication. To support this analysis, several previous studies related to semantic change and slang development will be reviewed.

Previous research on slang that has been reviewed is research conducted by Savitri & Dewi (2023) entitled “*Semantic Change on Imitative Slang Used by Indonesian Netizen*”. This research examines how the meanings of certain words have changed as the result of borrowing from or imitating common speech patterns on the Indonesian Internet. Relying on Bloomfield’s theory, the researchers looked at the way the meanings of these common expressions change with time on the internet. Among other things, the findings describe how some words start to have broader meanings, are sometimes used as metaphors, may be expressed intensely

and might lose their original impressive value. The study reveals that adding imitative slang to online conversations makes digital interactions creative and also shows how its meanings can change with cultural, humorous and social trends in Indonesia.

For another relevant study, is study conducted by Rahman et al. (2022) entitled “*Semantic Shift of English Internet Slangs Used in Social Media: Morphosemantic Analysis*”. This study looks at how various English words take on new meanings when used in online slang found on social networks. They examined how these terms are arranged and what they mean as they change over time within language use. While most of the examples did not change shape, their meanings switched, but 16% were made from existing roots, 4% were combinations of two words, 4% were applied independently, and 4% adopted both techniques. The research found that narrowing was the prominent way words changed their meanings, occurring in 72% of examples, in contrast to just 28% where meanings did not change. Even though many internet slang words look similar, what they mean can narrow and shift over time.

Research done by Fazza (2019) in another relevant study, the research title is “*Study of Semantic Change on Slang in YouTube Video Entitled "Mean Tweets-Avenger Edition" by Jimmy Kimmel Live*”. This study reported that a number of the slang words in the mean tweets display semantic changes and are closely linked to their origin words. The investigation shows that using slang involves specific processes in language that mirror what goes on in society. He found that meaning in slang found in mean tweets can grow bigger, swing toward being more positive,

become more negative or be shown in a figurative way. Slang users prove their strong command of language by adjusting its meanings and often use slang to share moods about others, often in ways that are amusing or critical.

Some previous studies related to slang and semantic change only focus on analyzing changes in the meaning or form of the origin of the word. On the other hand, the birth of a new slang certainly has its importance, and therefore, in this study, the analysis does not only focus on changes in the meaning of the word origin but also explores how the slang functions and is used.

1.2 Statement of Problem

The emergence of semantic change in the form of slang in the Dota 2 game on the SEA server is one of the most prominent linguistic phenomena in the gaming community. In addition, the slangs that appears in the game are still used even in different games with the same genre. This research focuses on discussing slang words and semantic change. Based on the research background above, two main questions are the focus of this research, namely as follows:

1. What types of semantic changes appear in slang word use in Dota 2 on the SEA server?
2. How do various factors contribute to the occurrence of these semantic changes in Dota 2 slang?

1.3 Research Purposes

Based on the formulation of the research question above, the objectives of this study are:

1. To analyze the types of semantic changes found in Dota 2 on the SEA server.
2. To analyze the factors that contribute to the occurrence of these semantic changes in Dota 2 slang.

1.4 Research Significances

The findings of this study provide insights into slang words as well as semantic change. In addition, this study can be used as a reference source of information and knowledge for readers and other researchers who are interested in analyzing slang words and semantic change. This research has some significance, including theoretical and practical significance, as can be seen below:

1. Theoretical Significance

Theoretical significances from this study support linguistic growth, particularly within semantic research areas. This research enlarges the semantic understanding of meaning transformation in language by analyzing slang development in social and cultural environments, which in this case is a game environment. Language innovation through slang adds value to semantic analysis by demonstrating how language meanings change under different community use conditions across time. Research findings provide groundwork for additional research that can explore linguistic studies for understanding how language develops through social dynamics.

2. Practical Significance

This research delivers multiple practical significances that various parties can experience. As a result of this study, gamers expect to gain more insights into their gameplay language use while better understanding both slang words and fluctuating word meanings that emerge between players as they interact. Better understanding enables gamers to improve their gameplay experiences and foster linguistic awareness throughout their gaming community. The research outcomes from this study offer game developers insights to design game narrative that implement language structures that match user profiles creating, so that it can create a narrative in the game that will be made more vivid and more interesting. This study provides basic knowledge that can be used by researchers to conduct further research on meaning change in the context of digital language and slang word usage.

1.5 Scope and Limitation

This research focuses on the slang words that are born in the Dota 2 game and also the semantic changes that occur in the slang words. More specifically, the slang words that are the main objects in this study are slang words that appear and are used in the Dota 2 game on the Southeast Asia server which includes players from several ASEAN member countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, the Phillipines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, Brunei and Myanmar and several other countries such as Mongolia, India and even Australia.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

To make it easier for readers to understand the terms used in this study, researchers provide several definitions for key terms. These terms can be seen below:

1. Semantic

Kurniawan et al. (2023) state that the root of semantics is the Greek phrase “*sema*”, which stands for sign or symbol. “*Semantikos*” in Greek means to make a sign. Within the field of linguistics, semantics came to refer to the study of the meaning of language. Semantics includes the study of the meaning of a word, how meanings evolve, and how their meaning is affected by the situations they appear.

2. Semantic Change

Fromkin et al. (2010) explain that a language may gain or lose lexical items. Furthermore, it is explained that semantic change itself is a change in the meaning or semantic representation of a word that can occur by becoming broader, narrower, or by shifting.

In addition, Blank & Koch (1999) explain that semantic change may occur due to various influencing factors. Need for a new name or concept, abstract concepts with invisible referents, sociocultural change, close conceptual relations, complexity and irregularity of the lexicon, and emotionally marked concepts.

3. Broader

Broader or broadening in semantic change refers to the expansion of the meaning of a word. According to Fromkin et al. (2010), one kind of semantic change occurs when the meaning of a word becomes broader, meaning everything it used to mean and more.

4. Narrower

Narrower, according to Fromkin et al. (2010), is a narrowing of the meaning of a word. In their book entitled *An Introduction to Language*, they give an example of a word that has narrowed, namely the word “deer”, which once meant “beast” or “animal, becoming a particular kind of animal.

5. Shifting

Shifting or meaning shifts merupakan pertukaran makna antara makna suatu kata dengan kata lain. Fromkin et al. (2010) state that the third kind of semantic change that a lexical item may undergo is a shift in meaning.

6. Slang Words

The definition of slang word, according to Anis (2017), is an unofficial language not included in the standard language that certain social groups usually use to communicate in depth so that non-members of the group do not understand. On the other hand, Abdul & Leonie (2010) explain that what is meant by slang is a social variation of language that is special and secret.

7. Dota 2

Dota 2 is a multiplayer online battle arena game that involves 10 players divided into 2 teams of 5 people. The game allows players to communicate,

both between teams and with the opposing team. The game launches on one of the largest digital gaming platforms, Steam, which is a digital video game distribution platform created by Valve Corporation.

8. Southeast Asian Server

Southeast asian server or players more often call it the SEA server is one of the servers available in Dota 2. This server covers several ASEAN countries and a few other countries. This server is often called a *toxic* server because players cuss at each other and play at their own pace.

