



## UTILIZING AND SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS: USE OF WORD “OTW” IN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS

**Dzulqarnain Rahmat Lilaalamin SS<sup>1</sup>, Hikma Patika Sari<sup>1</sup>,  
Riska Febrianti<sup>1</sup>, Subhan Rahmat<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>English Education Department, Tarbiyah and Teacher Training Faculty, UIN Alauddin Makassar

<sup>2</sup>Politeknik Pelayaran Barombong, South Sulawesi, Indonesia

\*Email: [dzulqarnainrahmat95@gmail.com](mailto:dzulqarnainrahmat95@gmail.com)

### Abstract

*This study investigates the use and socio-cultural significance of the expression “OTW” (on the way) within Indonesian digital communication. As informal language becomes increasingly influenced by digital interaction, it is essential to examine how expressions such as “OTW” evolve in meaning and function. Framed within a sociolinguistic perspective, this study explores how “OTW” extends beyond its literal interpretation to convey social intent and reflect cultural values, particularly those emphasizing social harmony over punctuality. A qualitative research design was implemented, combining semi-structured interviews with a literature review. Participants were selected across generational groups to capture diverse patterns of usage and interpretation. The findings indicate that “OTW” often operates as a communicative strategy rather than a factual statement, enabling users to manage expectations, reduce social tension, or maintain face in various digital contexts. However, this shift in meaning may result in miscommunication, particularly in professional or intercultural settings where punctuality is strictly valued. This research highlights the dynamic, adaptive nature of digital language and the need for communicative awareness in online interaction. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of how informal digital expressions reflect broader socio-cultural dynamics and suggests further inquiry into their impact on interpersonal trust, accountability, and cross-cultural communication.*

**Keywords:** *Effective Communications, Pragmatics, Semantics*

### INTRODUCTION

Language is a living system, it evolves, shifts, and adapts in response to the changing needs of its users. As societies grow and technology advances, so too does language, serving not only as a mirror of human experience but also as a tool for creativity and innovation (Jeresano & Carretero, 2022). In the past thousand years, the English language, in particular, has undergone vast transformations, shaped by cultural, political, and technological changes. This linguistic transformation has become even more apparent in today's digital era, where language development is significantly influenced by technology, especially through the internet and social media platforms. The increasing exposure to diverse forms of communication encourages people to adopt informal expressions and new vocabulary that may not traditionally exist in formal grammar, yet are widely understood within specific social contexts.

In today's era, multilingualism and the global use of English continue to flourish. Many individuals are now bilingual, seamlessly switching between two languages in daily interactions. This phenomenon, known as bilingualism, can occur on a personal or community level and often leads to code-switching, the blending of languages within a single conversation. These practices are not only influenced by social environments but also by technological tools and media platforms (Rusydah & Literature, 2018). With the widespread use of smartphones and constant online interaction, especially among youth, the way people communicate has become more flexible and creative. Platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook are used not only for social interaction but also for expressing identity through language using slang, acronyms, emoticons, and new expressions. According to Jeresano & Carretero (2022), this digital environment has accelerated the evolution of language as people interact freely and informally. Matias (2023) also notes that today's generation often communicates using abbreviated forms, mixed languages, and internet-specific symbols, reflecting their dynamic and digital lifestyle.

Several studies have explored how technology and society influence language use. For example, Lauder (2008), in his work "The Status and Function of English in Indonesia: A Key Factor", examined how English functions in Indonesia within historical, political, and sociocultural contexts. His descriptive qualitative study emphasizes the role of English in a multilingual nation, highlighting how language adapts to societal needs. Similarly, Jasilek (2013) in her article "The Effect of Social Media on Language" observes how social media encourages the shortening of phrases and the use of acronyms, such as turning "I will send her a message on Facebook" into "I'll FB her," or using "OMG" for "oh my god". In another study, Pikhart and Botezat (2021) discussed how increased social media usage particularly among students and teenagers has led to the creation of internet slang, emoticons, acronyms, and even new meanings for old words. These linguistic innovations not only demonstrate how language evolves but also how it becomes embedded in cultural practices and identity formation in online spaces.

Building on these findings, this study seeks to explore a specific expression "OTW" (short for "on the way") which is commonly used among Indonesian youth in both spoken conversation and online communication. While it may seem simple, the widespread and flexible use of "OTW" reflects broader linguistic and social trends. This research aims to investigate how this expression functions in daily communication, the meanings it conveys in different contexts, and what its usage reveals about language adaptation in the digital age.

### **Definitions of Semantics and Pragmatics**

The fields of semantics and pragmatics focus on the study of language as a semiotic system. The existence of these two distinct disciplines highlights both the complexity of human language and the ongoing debate about the best way to analyze it. This complexity can be categorized into at least four aspects. Semantics specifically examines the meaning in language, recognizing that language is used to communicate meanings that others can understand. Although meanings reside in our minds, we convey them through spoken and written language, as well as gestures and actions. The sound patterns of language are analyzed in phonology, while the structure of words and sentences is studied in

morphology and syntax. These elements are organized in a way that enables us to send and receive meaningful messages effectively.

And then, semantics is the branch of linguistic study that studies meaning. Since we cannot see or observe meaning the way we can watch and record sounds, it is the highest abstract level of linguistic study. The ability of humans to reason and comprehend is intimately linked to meaning. Therefore, when we attempt to evaluate meaning, we are attempting to examine our own cognitive abilities and comprehend our own capacity for meaning-making. "Giving a systematic account of the nature of meaning" is the focus of semantics (Leech, 1981). we use language not only to represent information (or thought) to ourselves and convey it to others, but also to act on and interact with others in ways that do not directly have to do with the transmission of information, such as greetings, exclamations or orders.

The focus of cognitive semantics is on the mental operations required to comprehend meaning (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). According to this idea, intellectual analogies, mental images, and our embodied experiences form the foundation of our comprehension of language. Cognitive semantics can be applied in the classroom to: examine how analogies and metaphors can improve comprehension of difficult ideas. For instance, teaching students that "learning is like building a house" might help them comprehend that information is acquired incrementally. Examine how pupils past experiences and knowledge affect the way they understand language. Teachers can modify their lesson plans to help students make the link between new ideas and their previous experience by getting to know the mental models that they bring to the classroom. However, in schools with a variety of cultural backgrounds, cognitive semantics could encounter difficulties. Cultural context can influence how metaphors and other figurative language are interpreted, thus educators need to be aware of the possibility of misconceptions (Holcomb, 2006).

Pragmatic competence refers to the ability to navigate the intricate relationship between language, its users, and the context of interaction. This complexity raises the question of whether pragmatic competence can truly be taught, prompting increased interest and growth in applied empirical research on teaching pragmatics (Kasper, 1997). Language, by nature, is both highly systematic and flexible. On one side, speakers face significant pressure to maintain consistency in their language use to ensure effective and reliable communication. On the other side, they constantly innovate, repurposing existing linguistic forms to express new or vastly different meanings through devices such as metaphor, irony, and other creative techniques.

The link between language and social environment is the main emphasis of social pragmatics (Grice, 1975). This theory highlights how language and context, as well as individuals' shared knowledge and intentions, all contribute to the meaning that words and grammar convey. Social pragmatics in the classroom can be used to: examine how students utilize language to accomplish various communicative objectives, such as expressing thoughts, obtaining information, and convincing others. Increase students' comprehension of nonverbal clues, such as tone of voice, gestures, and facial expressions, which are important for meaningmaking in classroom communication (Anderson et al., 2017). However, pupils who struggle with nonverbal communication or have low social interaction abilities may find social pragmatics challenging. To ensure that every student engages in class discussions and participates successfully, educators must take into account

each student's unique requirements and offer extra assistance. In conclusion, semantics focuses on the study of meaning in language and is closely connected to fields such as philosophy and logic. Meanwhile, pragmatics examines language from the perspective of its usage. Pragmatics encompasses various subfields, depending on the emphasis placed by linguists. It can be analyzed purely from a linguistic standpoint or with consideration of social factors.

Effective message transmission and interpretation depend heavily on semantics, the foundation for comprehending meaning in communication (Geurts, 2019). It explores the relationship between the ideas or conceptions that our signs and symbols (signifiers) reflect and the signs themselves (Lemke, 1998). Every aspect of human contact, including written and spoken language as well as nonverbal clues like gestures and facial expressions, is shaped by this complex balance between form and meaning. Denotation, or the literal meaning of a word or phrase, is one of the basic concepts of semantics. It is obvious what is meant when someone says, "The cat sat on the mat," as a cat is placed on a piece of woven fabric (Cruse, 2010). Semantics, however, goes beyond appearances and includes connotation as well. Beyond its denotation, a word's connotation refers to the extra thoughts, feelings, and cultural baggage it conveys. For example, depending on an individual's experiences and cultural background, the word "cat" may convey thoughts of independence or cuteness (Textor, 2010).

### **Overview of Semantics in Communication**

It is essential to comprehend these underlying meaning levels to communicate effectively. For example, "The politician dodged the question." The connotation suggests a purposeful and maybe manipulative behavior, but the denotation says the politician just chose not to respond. By identifying these subtleties, we can improve the accuracy of our message interpretation and prevent misunderstandings. Semantics also includes the several ways in which we interpret signs together. The principles that determine how words are put together in sentences or syntax are extremely important.

Semantics also recognizes the ambiguity that is a part of language. Homonyms are words that have more than one meaning, while polysemy is the structure of sentences that permits many readings. Accurately interpreting the intended message requires taking into account multiple options and comprehending the context (Levinson, 1983).

### **Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**

The ideological and social power dynamics ingrained in language use are the subject of CDA (Fairclough, 2003). This theory looks at how language may perpetuate social inequality, preserve power hierarchies, and form knowledge. Using CDA in the classroom may be used to: examine how certain knowledge views or cultural biases may be portrayed in textbooks and other educational resources. Students' critical thinking abilities are strengthened as a result, giving them the ability to challenge the presumptions and ideals ingrained in language. Consider how instructors' dominance of conversations or their silencing of specific perspectives can be examples of how classroom discourse itself can perpetuate power disparities. Teachers who acknowledge and address these issues can create a more equitable and inclusive learning environment. Nevertheless, CDA may be a sophisticated and nuanced method that calls for extensive teacher preparation as well as setting aside time for study and conversation. Teachers must make sure that students at

varying ages and developmental stages can access and understand CDA by providing the proper complexity and scaffolding.

Through an examination of these many theoretical frameworks, educators may get a more profound comprehension of the complex aspects of semantics in classroom communication. Every theory provides a unique perspective through which to examine the processes of meaning construction, interpretation, and contextual and linguistic influences. Through the integration of diverse perspectives and customization to meet the unique requirements of their pupils and learning context, educators can create a learning environment that enhances communication clarity and effectiveness, develops critical thinking abilities, and equips students to effectively navigate language complexities in both their personal and academic live.

## METHOD

Using interview techniques and library research, this study takes a qualitative approach. Analytical and descriptive research on research is known as a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is an exploration process. Thus, an occurrence can be thoroughly studied by researchers.

One of the key methods used in this approach is the interview, which serves to collect relevant information through direct interaction between the researcher and the participant. As noted by Ary et al. (2017), interviews involve structured or semi-structured face-to-face communication guided by a set of prepared questions, allowing for the in-depth collection of personal insights and contextual understanding. This method emphasizes the importance of human connection and open dialogue, making it a powerful tool for exploring participants’ perspectives. In this research, the term “OTW” is introduced in effective communication to explore its application and societal implications. Through meaningful social interaction, the interview becomes not just a data collection method, but also a space where participants can express their thoughts and experiences, enabling the researcher to gain a more holistic view of the phenomenon being studied.

Literature review, as it is commonly referred to, is a summary of the work and theories of researchers who have explored a topic either through written works or empirical investigation in order to gather relevant conceptual and theoretical data. In conducting this literature review, the researchers used the keywords "semantic," "OTW," and "effective communication" to search for journal articles and related studies. One of the central issues examined is the use of the term "OTW" (short for "on the way") in modern communication, particularly its function and impact in digital interactions.

Semantic analysis plays a crucial role in understanding the meaning of words and phrases within the context of digital communication. In the era of social media, new expressions such as “OTW” have emerged and are widely used, especially among the younger generation in Indonesia. A study by Yousif, (2023) explores various semantic analysis methods, including Latent Semantic Analysis (LSA), Explicit Semantic Analysis (ESA), and neural network-based models, all of which contribute to understanding meaning in natural language and text. Furthermore, Salloum et al., (2020) emphasize the importance of semantic analysis in natural language processing, particularly how techniques like LSA and ESA can be utilized to interpret opinions and attitudes in text. In

this digital age, slang terms like “OTW” reflect language adaptation to the demands of fast and informal communication.

Therefore, semantic analysis of the term “OTW” in digital communication offers insights into how language evolves and adapts in response to shifting social and technological contexts. This literature review helps validate and support the exploration of “OTW” as a linguistic phenomenon, illustrating both its linguistic relevance and societal implications in effective communication today.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Findings**

In its original language, "OTW" (on the way) signifies that someone is en route to their destination. However, in everyday communication, this meaning often shifts. Many individuals use this term to indicate that they are still preparing or just starting to get ready to leave. This reflects a change in the contextual usage of the term, where "OTW" no longer solely describes a literal state but has become an expression of intention that may not match the actual situation. The meaning of "OTW" tends to be understood differently depending on the users' social backgrounds and levels of language literacy. For instance, individuals with a strong understanding of English may interpret "OTW" literally, while others may view it as a flexible expression to convey travel plans. In Indonesian culture, "OTW" is often used as a status on social media or in text messages, even before the journey begins. This highlights differences in perception among users, often influenced by habits and social contexts.

On other hand, Western culture generally places greater emphasis on punctuality and the literal use of terms like "OTW." When someone says "OTW," they are truly on their way. In contrast, in Indonesia, this term is often used more loosely, disregarding its original meaning. This indicates a cultural gap in interpreting time and commitments, where flexibility is often prioritized over precision. Such differences may pose challenges in cross-cultural communication. The improper use of "OTW" often results in inefficiencies in communication. Many respondents expressed frustration when the term was used by someone who was still at home or just starting to prepare. Miscommunication usually arises in informal settings, such as social gatherings or casual meetings, where expectations do not align with reality. This can erode trust between individuals and slow down the flow of communication.

Next The inaccuracy of "OTW" usage significantly impacts social relationships and professionalism. In social contexts, it can cause trust issues and frustration. In professional settings, this inaccuracy can reflect a lack of commitment and responsibility to agreed-upon schedules or tasks. Respondents indicated that this behavior often mirrors individual habits and specific cultural practices where time flexibility is more widely accepted. Despite its negative impacts, "OTW" contributes to the development of modern communication. As a borrowed term from English, it enriches the vocabulary and communication styles of Indonesians. Its widespread use through technologies like social media and instant messaging demonstrates how language adaptation accommodates the needs of modern society. However, a better understanding of the term's context and meaning is necessary to enhance communication effectiveness.

he usage of "OTW" reflects generational differences and cultural changes within Indonesian society. Younger generations, such as millennials, tend to use the term more flexibly and creatively, while older generations may not understand its meaning at all. These differences show how technology and pop culture influence the way we speak and interact. Moving forward, it is essential for society to strike a balance between creativity in language use and adherence to accurate meanings, particularly in formal or cross-cultural contexts.

## Discussion

### a. Transformation of Meaning in Modern Language Usage

The shift in the usage of "OTW" from its literal meaning to a more flexible interpretation aligns with Saussure's theory of *signifier and signified*. Ferdinand de Saussure (1916) emphasizes that the relationship between a word (signifier) and its meaning (signified) is arbitrary and subject to change over time based on cultural and social influences. In the case of "OTW," its signified concept has evolved within Indonesian culture to accommodate broader contexts, such as expressing intentions or plans, even when not physically "on the way." This demonstrates how cultural adaptations can influence linguistic evolution, as also noted by Sapir (1921), who argued that language is a direct reflection of cultural behavior.

### b. Perception and Cultural Influence on Communication

Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory (1980) provides a useful framework for understanding the differing perceptions of "OTW." Hofstede's distinction between individualist and collectivist societies explains why punctuality and literalness in language are more rigid in Western cultures but more flexible in collectivist societies like Indonesia. In Indonesia, the use of "OTW" reflects a cultural tendency to prioritize social harmony and flexibility over precision, as supported by Triandis (1995), who noted that collectivist cultures often accommodate ambiguity in communication for the sake of interpersonal relationships.

### c. The Role of "OTW" in Shaping Communication Efficiency

Shannon and Weaver's (1949) model of communication highlights how noise in the communication process can distort the intended message. In this case, the improper use of "OTW" introduces semantic noise, where the receiver's understanding of the term differs from the sender's intention. This misalignment reduces communication efficiency and can result in frustration or delays. The findings echo Grice's (1975) maxims of conversation, particularly the maxim of quality, which stresses the importance of truthfulness in communication. Misusing "OTW" violates this maxim, undermining trust between interlocutors.

### d. Social and Professional Implications of Inconsistent Usage

The professional implications of misusing "OTW" are consistent with Goffman's (1959) theory of *impression management*. Goffman argued that individuals actively manage their social image to maintain credibility and respect. When "OTW" is used inaccurately in professional contexts, it damages the individual's reputation by signaling unreliability. This

behavior aligns with Hall's (1976) high-context culture theory, which suggests that implicit communication styles in high-context cultures, such as Indonesia, may inadvertently contribute to misunderstandings when interacting with low-context expectations of clarity and precision.

#### **e. Linguistic Contribution of "OTW" to Modern Communication**

The integration of "OTW" into modern Indonesian communication illustrates how globalized languages influence local lexicons. This process resonates with Kachru's (1985) model of World Englishes, which recognizes that English terms are often localized to fit cultural and linguistic norms. While this enriches the vocabulary, it also emphasizes the need for cultural competence to navigate nuanced meanings effectively. As noted by Canagarajah (2005), the hybridization of language in multilingual societies can foster creativity but requires users to remain mindful of context and audience.

#### **f. Generational and Technological Impact on Language Use**

The adoption of "OTW" by younger generations reflects Fishman's (1991) view of language as a means of identity expression. Millennials and Gen Z are more inclined to adopt linguistic trends shaped by technological advancements, such as social media and instant messaging. However, this can create generational gaps in understanding, as highlighted by Holmes (2013), who observed that language evolution driven by technology often leaves older generations struggling to adapt. This underscores the need for intergenerational dialogue to bridge such gaps and enhance mutual understanding.

#### **g. Toward Balanced and Effective Communication Practices**

Achieving effective communication requires balancing linguistic creativity with clarity, as advocated by Hymes (1972) in his *communicative competence* framework. Hymes emphasized the importance of understanding both linguistic rules and social contexts to ensure meaningful interactions. Educating users about the appropriate use of terms like "OTW" can foster trust and improve communication efficiency. Moreover, adopting a culturally sensitive approach, as suggested by Kramsch (1993), can help individuals navigate the complexities of multilingual and multicultural communication more effectively.

### **CONCLUSION**

The study reveals the dynamic and evolving nature of language, particularly the use of "OTW" (on the way) within Indonesian communication. Initially signifying a literal journey, "OTW" has undergone a semantic shift, reflecting cultural adaptations and user convenience. This transformation highlights the influence of social and cultural factors on language, aligning with linguistic theories such as Saussure's *signifier and signified*. The varied perceptions of "OTW" emphasize the impact of cultural norms and generational differences on communication. While Western cultures prioritize punctuality and literal meanings, Indonesian society exhibits a more flexible approach, influenced by collectivist values. However, this flexibility often leads to inefficiencies and miscommunication, as evidenced by the misuse of "OTW" in informal and professional settings.

Despite its challenges, the integration of "OTW" into everyday language enriches modern communication by fostering creativity and linguistic innovation. This aligns with



studies on the localization of global terms in multilingual societies, such as Indonesia. Furthermore, younger generations' adoption of "OTW" reflects the role of technology in shaping language use, underscoring the generational shift in communication practices. The findings also underline the need for a balanced approach to communication, where linguistic creativity is tempered with clarity and adherence to shared meanings. Efforts to educate users about appropriate usage and foster intercultural understanding are essential to mitigate the risks of miscommunication and maintain trust in both social and professional contexts.

Lastly, the evolving use of "OTW" serves as a microcosm of broader linguistic and cultural dynamics in modern society. By understanding and addressing these dynamics, individuals can navigate the complexities of language use more effectively, fostering meaningful and efficient communication across diverse contexts

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