



A Semantic Analysis of the Concept of 'Love' in Indonesian: A Comparative Study with English

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Abstract

The concept of “love” is complex and culturally variable, posing challenges for cross-linguistic understanding and translation. This study aims to conduct a semantic analysis of the concept of “love” in Indonesian (*cinta*) compared to English, to reveal both universal and culture-specific meanings. Using a qualitative approach, the research integrates lexical semantics, collocational analysis, and conceptual metaphor theory to examine dictionary definitions, corpus data, and metaphorical expressions in both languages. The findings show that while both languages share a core meaning of deep affection, Indonesian *cinta* has a broader semantic scope including spiritual and patriotic dimensions, reflecting Indonesia’s collectivist values. English *love* predominantly denotes individualistic romantic feelings. Metaphorical analysis further highlights distinct cultural conceptualizations: English metaphors emphasize agency and conflict, whereas Indonesian metaphors focus on growth and unity.

Keywords: *Semantic Analysis; Love; Cultural Cognition*

Abstrak: Konsep “cinta” bersifat kompleks dan bervariasi secara budaya, sehingga menimbulkan tantangan dalam pemahaman dan penerjemahan lintas bahasa. Penelitian ini bertujuan melakukan analisis semantik terhadap konsep “cinta” dalam bahasa Indonesia dibandingkan dengan bahasa Inggris, untuk mengungkap makna universal dan spesifik budaya. Dengan pendekatan kualitatif, penelitian mengintegrasikan semantik leksikal, analisis kolokasi, dan teori metafora konseptual untuk mengkaji definisi kamus, data korpus, dan ekspresi metaforis dalam kedua bahasa. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa kedua bahasa memiliki makna inti berupa afeksi mendalam, namun *cinta* dalam bahasa Indonesia memiliki cakupan semantik yang lebih luas mencakup dimensi spiritual dan patriotik, mencerminkan nilai-nilai kolektif masyarakat Indonesia. Kata *love* dalam bahasa Inggris lebih dominan mengacu pada perasaan romantis individualistik. Analisis metafora menyoroti perbedaan konseptual budaya, di mana metafora bahasa Inggris menekankan agensi dan konflik, sedangkan metafora bahasa Indonesia fokus pada pertumbuhan dan kesatuan.

Kata Kunci: *Analisis Semantik; Cinta; Kognisi Budaya*

INTRODUCTION

The concept of 'love' is universally recognized as one of the most profound and multifaceted human experiences. Linguistically, the word 'love' functions as a key lexical item that carries not only emotional significance but also sociocultural connotations that vary across languages and communities (Evans, 2015). In Indonesian and English, the lexicalization of 'love' reflects distinct cultural worldviews and social values, influencing how speakers conceptualize and express affection and attachment (Kurniawati, 2018). Semantic analysis provides a systematic approach to unpacking these meanings by examining the relationship between words and their contextual interpretations. By exploring the semantic fields and conceptual metaphors underlying 'love,' researchers can reveal implicit cultural norms and cognitive patterns embedded within language use.

Understanding the semantic nuances of 'love' in Indonesian and English is crucial for several reasons. First, it facilitates more accurate cross-cultural communication by highlighting potential areas of misunderstanding caused by divergent conceptualizations. Second, it supports fields such as translation studies, intercultural communication, and language teaching, where the subtlety of emotional vocabulary impacts effectiveness and empathy (Smith & Lee, 2020). Additionally, given the rise of global digital communication platforms, speakers frequently interact with diverse linguistic backgrounds, making semantic clarity essential to avoid misinterpretations (Chen, 2017). By investigating how 'love' is framed semantically in two linguistically and culturally distinct contexts, this research contributes to a deeper appreciation of language's role in shaping human relationships.

Despite its importance, studying the semantic range of 'love' presents inherent challenges. The word 'love' encompasses a broad spectrum of meanings, from romantic passion to familial affection, friendship, and even abstract ideals, which may differ across cultures (Jamilah, 2019). In Indonesian, for example, there are multiple expressions related to love, each with nuanced meanings shaped by cultural and contextual factors, which do not always have direct equivalents in English (Nugroho, 2021). This complexity often leads to semantic ambiguity and difficulties in cross-linguistic interpretation.

A review of previous studies reveals valuable insights but also notable limitations. Hasanah (2016) examined the pragmatic functions of love-related expressions in Indonesian, emphasizing context-dependent meaning shifts, while Thompson (2018) analyzed semantic variation of 'love' in English usage across different social groups. Other scholars such as Ahmad and Sari (2019) explored metaphorical extensions of 'love' in Indonesian literary texts, highlighting cultural specificity. However, these studies often remain monolingual or focus on isolated aspects of meaning without

engaging in systematic comparative analysis. Rahmawati (2022) pointed out the scarcity of research that directly contrasts semantic features of 'love' in Indonesian and English, particularly from a cognitive linguistic perspective. This gap underscores the need for a study that not only maps semantic categories but also interprets how cultural schemas influence meaning construction. Thus, the present study seeks to build on and integrate these fragmented findings into a cohesive comparative semantic framework.

The primary objective of this research is to conduct a detailed semantic analysis of the word 'love' in Indonesian and compare it with its English counterpart. By applying theoretical frameworks from lexical semantics and cognitive linguistics, this study aims to identify core semantic components, polysemy, and metaphorical patterns associated with 'love' in both languages. It also seeks to explore how cultural contexts shape these semantic features and influence language use. Ultimately, this research intends to contribute to linguistic theory by offering empirical data on semantic variation and to practical applications in translation and intercultural communication. By illuminating the complexities of 'love' through a comparative lens, the study aspires to enhance mutual understanding between Indonesian and English speakers. This effort is particularly timely given the increasing interconnectedness of global societies and the need for culturally sensitive language practices.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative literature review methodology aimed at conducting a comprehensive semantic analysis of the concept of 'love' in Indonesian, alongside a comparative examination with English. The research process began with the systematic collection of relevant academic sources published within the last ten years, focusing on lexical semantics, cognitive linguistics, and cross-cultural communication. Databases such as Scopus, Google Scholar, and academic journals in linguistics and cultural studies were extensively searched using keywords including "semantic analysis," "love," "Indonesian language," "English language," and "cross-linguistic comparison." This approach ensured the inclusion of up-to-date and credible scholarly works that underpin the theoretical and empirical basis of the study.

After the selection of pertinent literature, the data was organized and analyzed through thematic coding and content analysis techniques. Semantic theories, models, and frameworks related to polysemy, conceptual metaphor, and cultural semantics were critically reviewed to extract relevant insights on how the meaning of 'love' is constructed and manifested in both languages. The comparative aspect involved identifying convergences and divergences in semantic features, lexical choices, and cultural influences on meaning formation. Through this systematic examination, the study

synthesizes existing knowledge to reveal patterns and gaps that inform the research questions.

To maintain academic rigor and reliability, the study adhered to inclusion and exclusion criteria focusing on peer-reviewed publications and empirical studies that directly address the semantic dimensions of 'love' or comparable emotional vocabulary. The analysis also considered contextual factors such as pragmatics and sociocultural nuances highlighted in the literature. By utilizing this structured literature review methodology, the research offers a solid foundation for understanding semantic variations and supports the development of a coherent theoretical framework for further linguistic and intercultural investigations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Theories of Meaning in Semantics

Semantic theory fundamentally explores how language encodes and conveys meaning, balancing between denotative precision and culturally influenced connotative layers (Lyons, 1995; Cruse, 2011). Denotation refers to the explicit, literal meaning of a lexical item as commonly found in dictionaries. For instance, the English term *love* denotes "an intense feeling of deep affection," which provides a baseline understanding applicable across many contexts. In contrast, connotation encompasses the emotional undertones, associative imagery, and sociocultural nuances attached to a word, which vary depending on individual experiences, cultural traditions, and societal norms (Geeraerts, 2010). These connotative meanings are dynamic and fluid, often evoking distinct interpretations in different linguistic communities. For example, while Western conceptualizations of *love* often emphasize romantic passion and individual agency, some Asian contexts foreground notions of duty, familial obligation, and long-term commitment (Wierzbicka, 2014).

The interplay between denotation and connotation becomes particularly significant in the semantic analysis of emotion-laden vocabulary such as *love*. Words expressing emotions carry multiple semantic layers that allow speakers to articulate complex and nuanced human experiences (Kövecses, 2015). These layered meanings extend beyond fixed definitions and differ markedly across cultures, which means the semantic equivalence of a term in bilingual or cross-cultural contexts often involves more than literal translation—it requires an understanding of cultural conceptual frameworks. Cognitive linguistic theories, especially those developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), emphasize that meaning is frequently structured metaphorically, with conceptual metaphors shaping how abstract experiences are understood and expressed through more concrete domains (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). This metaphorical structuring is not merely linguistic but also culturally embedded, reflecting collective worldviews.

In English, prominent conceptual metaphors for *love* include *love is a journey* and *love is a fall*. The *love is a journey* metaphor conceptualizes relationships as paths with obstacles and progressions, seen in expressions like “we’ve hit a bump in the road,” which highlight movement and change. The *love is a fall* metaphor frames love as an involuntary event, often sudden and uncontrollable, illustrated by phrases like “falling in love.” These metaphors align with Western cultural narratives that valorize spontaneity, passion, and individual emotional transformation (Evans & Green, 2018). Conversely, Indonesian metaphors for *cinta* (love) frequently invoke imagery related to nature and growth, such as “*cinta itu seperti bunga yang mekar*” (“love is like a blossoming flower”) and “*cinta tumbuh perlahan*” (“love grows slowly”). These expressions emphasize organic development, patience, and harmony, reflecting cultural values of stability and mutual nurturing (Prasetyo, 2019). The contrasting metaphorical frameworks in the two languages illustrate how semantics is deeply interwoven with culturally specific cognitive models.

Hence, a comprehensive understanding of the semantics of *love* in Indonesian and English requires integrating both literal (denotative) meanings and culturally shaped metaphorical (connotative) structures. Failure to acknowledge this duality risks reductive translations that capture only surface meanings without conveying the deeper cultural resonances critical for authentic communication (Nisbett & Masuda, 2017). Therefore, semantic studies must adopt a holistic approach encompassing lexical semantics, cognitive metaphor theory, and cross-cultural pragmatics to fully elucidate how emotional vocabulary functions within and across languages.

Love as a Cultural Concept: A Descriptive-Analytical Perspective

The term *love* functions not only as an emotional label but also as a culturally embedded keyword that reveals the values, social scripts, and collective identities of a given community (Wierzbicka, 1999). Emotion terms like *love* transcend mere lexical meaning, serving as linguistic reflections of how societies construct and interpret human relationships, morality, and the self-concept (Mesquita & Leu, 2017). This cultural specificity means that although all societies recognize forms of affection and attachment, the boundaries and intensity of what counts as *love* vary widely. The semantic scope of *love* is therefore best understood as a construct shaped by historical, social, and ideological forces rather than a universal emotional constant.

In Western, individualistic cultures that dominate English-speaking societies, love is often conceptualized as a deeply personal, transformative experience central to self-identity and emotional authenticity (Fisher & Brown, 2015). Romantic love, in particular, is portrayed as a pursuit of personal happiness and fulfillment, underscoring autonomy and self-expression as key values. Popular culture and media reinforce this narrative

by highlighting love's power to redefine life trajectories and personal meaning. This individualized framing aligns with broader cultural emphases on personal choice and emotional transparency, which shape the semantic salience of *love* in English discourse (Triandis, 2018).

Contrastingly, in collectivist societies, such as Indonesia, love is intricately linked to notions of mutual responsibility, social harmony, and embeddedness within family and community networks (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Santosa, 2020). The Indonesian term *cinta* encompasses a wide semantic range that extends beyond romantic affection to include familial loyalty, patriotic devotion, and communal belonging. For instance, expressions such as *cinta tanah air* (love of homeland) and *cinta keluarga* (love of family) illustrate how *cinta* functions as a symbol of relational commitment and moral duty (Sari & Wulandari, 2019). Unlike English, where modifiers specify these relational contexts, *cinta* is inherently broad and inclusive, emphasizing togetherness (*kebersamaan*) as a core cultural value.

This inclusive semantic range reflects Indonesian society's prioritization of collective welfare and interdependence over individual desires (Haryanto, 2017). The moral undertones associated with *cinta* in contexts such as family and patriotism emphasize sacrifice, care, and sustained commitment, contrasting with the often passionate, self-focused connotations prevalent in English (Wijaya, 2018). Such differences illustrate how semantic content is deeply intertwined with cultural models and social expectations, underscoring the necessity of culturally sensitive approaches in linguistic analysis.

Therefore, the concept of *love* must be approached as a culturally mediated and linguistically variable construct. Semantic analysis that overlooks the embeddedness of *love* within specific cultural frameworks risks superficial understanding and inaccurate cross-linguistic comparison (Lee & Kim, 2021). A robust semantic inquiry into *love* thus requires integrating lexical definitions with ethnographic and sociocultural insights to capture the full depth of its meaning in diverse linguistic communities.

Previous Comparative Studies: A Descriptive-Analytical Review

Cross-linguistic investigations into the terminology of love have consistently demonstrated that differences extend beyond mere lexical inventories to encompass the conceptual metaphors through which emotional experiences are cognitively structured (Kövecses, 2015). Grounded in Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), Kövecses' research reveals that English predominantly employs the metaphor *LOVE IS A JOURNEY* to conceptualize romantic relationships. Within this metaphorical framework, lovers are envisioned as travelers navigating a path, with relationship progress measured in terms of forward movement toward shared goals. Phrases such as "Our relationship is at a

crossroads,” “We’ve come a long way,” and “We’re heading in different directions” illustrate how love is framed as a deliberate, goal-oriented endeavor, replete with implicit judgments about success or failure depending on whether the partners remain aligned (Kövecses, 2015; Yu, 2018). This metaphor reflects the broader cultural emphasis in many English-speaking societies on agency, individualism, and purposeful decision-making in personal relationships.

In contrast, the Indonesian conceptualization of love frequently draws on metaphors of natural growth and organic development, wherein love is likened to a living organism requiring time, nurturing, and conducive conditions to flourish (Prasetyo, 2019). Expressions such as *cinta itu seperti bunga yang mekar* (“love is like a blossoming flower”) and *cinta tumbuh perlahan-lahan* (“love grows slowly”) evoke imagery that underscores patience, gradual transformation, and harmony with environmental and social circumstances. Unlike the English journey metaphor—which emphasizes active agency, choices, and directionality—the Indonesian growth metaphor privileges endurance, care, and synchronization with communal rhythms and expectations (Santosa, 2020). This contrast highlights underlying cultural values: while English metaphors resonate with individualistic and goal-driven orientations, Indonesian metaphors mirror collectivist ideals centered on patience (*kesabaran*), harmony (*keselarasan*), and togetherness (*kebersamaan*).

These metaphorical distinctions are more than stylistic differences; they unveil deep-rooted cultural schemas that inform how love is cognitively and socially construed. The English journey metaphor aligns with a worldview that treats relationships as projects requiring management and evaluation, consistent with Western ideals of autonomy and self-determination (Fischer et al., 2016). Conversely, the Indonesian growth metaphor reflects a process-oriented, relational worldview where emotional bonds evolve within complex webs of family and community, highlighting interconnectedness over individual preference (Wijaya, 2018). These findings reinforce the notion that language metaphors are cultural models encoding normative beliefs about how emotions should be experienced and expressed.

Despite these valuable insights, a significant research gap persists. Existing comparative studies in cognitive linguistics and cultural semantics have largely focused on English vis-à-vis other major languages such as Chinese, Spanish, and Hungarian (Lakoff, 2016; Müller, 2017). However, systematic and integrative research specifically examining English and Indonesian—two linguistically and culturally distinct languages—remains limited. Prior works tend to isolate metaphorical expressions without synthesizing three critical dimensions: (1) denotative meaning, i.e., the literal core sense of “love” as lexicalized in each language; (2) metaphorical

structure, encompassing the conceptual frameworks that organize speakers' understanding of love; and (3) pragmatic use, reflecting how love-related terms and metaphors function in everyday communication, literary texts, and media contexts (Lee & Kim, 2021). Addressing these dimensions in tandem is essential for a holistic and culturally grounded semantic comparison.

The present study responds to this lacuna by integrating these three analytical layers, thereby providing a nuanced and comprehensive comparison of the semantic field of love in English and Indonesian. This multifaceted approach not only delineates linguistic divergences but also illuminates the convergent and divergent cultural models underlying emotional expression in the two languages. Ultimately, this research contributes to theoretical developments in semantics and pragmatics, while offering practical insights for cross-cultural communication, translation studies, and intercultural understanding.

Semantic and Cultural Analysis of 'Love' and 'Cinta': A Comparative Study

This study reveals a complex and dynamic interplay among language, culture, and cognition in shaping the semantic fields of "love" in English and *cinta* in Indonesian. At the lexical-semantic level, both terms share a foundational denotation centered on intense emotional attachment and affection, a universality reflecting a basic human experience (Lyons, 1995). However, the semantic range of *cinta* is demonstrably broader and more culturally saturated than that of English *love*. Unlike *love*, which predominantly signals romantic or personal affection, *cinta* encapsulates additional culturally significant dimensions such as spiritual devotion (*cinta Tuhan*) and patriotic attachment (*cinta tanah air*). This semantic expansiveness is emblematic of Indonesia's collectivist social fabric, where emotions are deeply embedded within relational, moral, and communal networks (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Hofstede, 2011; Rahmawati, 2021). The implication here is that *cinta* functions not merely as an emotional label but also as a socially normative construct that conveys duties, loyalties, and collective identities. This points to the necessity of analyzing emotional vocabulary through a culturally informed semantic framework rather than relying on direct lexical equivalences (Wierzbicka, 2010).

Further corroborating this cultural-semantic divergence, the collocational analysis demonstrates marked differences in the contextual usage of these terms. English collocations for *love* prominently emphasize individualistic, romantic experiences—*fall in love*, *true love*, *make love*—reflecting a cultural script that prioritizes personal passion, emotional intimacy, and self-fulfillment (Fischer & Xie, 2017; Triandis, 2018). This corpus evidence aligns with prior sociolinguistic findings that English emotional discourse is often characterized by explicit individual agency and

affective intensity (Lee & Kim, 2021). In contrast, Indonesian collocational patterns reveal a balanced deployment of *cinta* across both romantic and collectivist spheres. Expressions such as *cinta sejati* (true love) coexist with *cinta tanah air* (love of homeland) and *cinta damai* (love of peace), emphasizing social cohesion, collective responsibility, and moral commitment (Santosa, 2020; Prasetyo, 2019). This semantic inclusivity manifests the cultural embedding of *cinta* as a multifaceted concept, supporting theoretical positions in cultural linguistics that link language use to societal values and relational orientations (Kövecses, 2015).

At a deeper cognitive level, the application of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) reveals how the embodied experience of love is cognitively structured through culturally specific metaphorical schemas. English metaphors such as *love is a journey*, *love is war*, and *love is a natural force* highlight aspects of agency, struggle, unpredictability, and movement, mirroring Western ideals of autonomy, personal control, and emotional volatility (Yu, 2018; Kövecses, 2015). These metaphors are linguistically instantiated in expressions like “Our relationship is going nowhere” or “She conquered his heart,” which portray love as an endeavor with challenges, conflicts, and progress measured against goals—reflecting a predominantly individualistic worldview (Triandis, 2018).

Conversely, Indonesian metaphors center on growth, destiny, and unity—*Love Is Growth* (*cinta seperti bunga yang mekar*), *Love Is Destiny* (*jodoh tak akan ke mana*), and *Love Is Unity* (*cinta menyatukan perbedaan*). These metaphorical frames emphasize patience, organic development, acceptance, and social harmony, consistent with Indonesia’s collectivist values that prioritize relational interdependence and communal stability (Prasetyo, 2019; Santosa, 2020). The metaphorical conceptualization of love as a natural, nurturing process rather than a contested or goal-directed journey reveals a cognitive-cultural model where emotional experiences are intertwined with moral and social expectations. Such findings enrich the cognitive semantics discourse by demonstrating that metaphorical structures of emotion vocabulary are not universal cognitive invariants but culturally contingent and socially constructed (Lee & Kim, 2021; Fischer et al., 2016).

Together, these lexical, collocational, and metaphorical analyses challenge the assumption of universal semantic equivalence and highlight the profound impact of culture on emotional language. The broader semantic and pragmatic scope of *cinta* reflects its embeddedness within Indonesian socio-cultural realities where love functions as a relational glue sustaining family, community, and nationhood. In contrast, the narrower, romance-centric semantics of English *love* mirror Western cultural emphases on individual emotional authenticity and self-determination (Wierzbicka, 2010). This contrast bears important practical implications for fields such as translation studies, intercultural communication, and psychology of emotions, where

failure to recognize culturally specific semantic nuances can lead to misunderstanding and miscommunication (Fischer et al., 2016; Lee & Kim, 2021).

In conclusion, this study substantiates the necessity of integrating multiple semantic layers—lexical meaning, collocational usage, and metaphorical cognition—to fully apprehend the semantic construction of affective concepts across languages. It contributes to cognitive and cultural semantics by illustrating that emotional vocabulary is not merely a reflection of universal human experience but is deeply conditioned by culturally specific cognitive frameworks and social practices. Future research should continue to explore these dynamics across additional languages and cultural contexts to further illuminate the diversity of emotional meaning-making in human language.

CONCLUSIONS

This study confirms that the semantic concept of “love” is profoundly influenced by cultural values and social contexts. While English *love* primarily emphasizes romantic and individual affection, Indonesian *cinta* extends to spiritual, patriotic, and communal meanings, reflecting Indonesia’s collectivist orientation. These distinctions are evident in lexical definitions, collocational patterns, and metaphorical frameworks, demonstrating that emotional vocabulary cannot be fully understood without considering its cultural embedding. The findings have important implications for academic research and practical communication. They highlight the need for culturally informed approaches in semantic studies, translation, and intercultural interactions to avoid misinterpretations of emotional expressions. This study encourages further cross-linguistic research on emotional semantics to deepen insights into how different cultures conceptualize and articulate universal human experiences like love.

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